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SELECTED ASPECTS OF EARLY SOCIAL HISTORY
OF DE KALB COUNTY, ILLINOIS

by

Otto John Tinzmann

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

January

1986

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Robert McCluggage. He gave me invaluable support and assistance throughout, from earliest conceptualizations of the dissertation to the final writing. I also wish to express my gratitude to my wife, Margaret Banker Tinzmann, Ph.D., for essential help and much encouragement in the use of the word processor.

VITA

The author, Otto J. Tinzmann, was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, on 8 April 1923. He received a Bachelor of Philosophy degree from the University of Chicago in 1947, and a Master of Arts degree in History from De Paul University in 1970.

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INTRODUCTION

The critical difference between the new land seekers from the East and those who had earlier settled the counties of southern Illinois was economic. The first settlers were poor hunter-pioneers who moved from Kentucky and Tennessee and eventually settled a few acres in the southern woodlands of Illinois. They were then succeeded by small farmers who had little money and who did little to develop the land. They in turn were succeeded by more substantial farmers in search of a permanent location. These farmers, for example, cleared the land and fenced the fields and built barns and outhouses for their equipment and animals. In northern Illinois, however, the sequence of settlement evident in southern Illinois did not occur. Instead, the substantial farmer was the first on the land.

The settlement of northern Illinois coincided with two important developments which gave this section of the state a social history unique to the state as a whole. First, the land had to be legally available, and the farm had to be free from threats of harassment from the Indians. Thus, the Indian problem had to be solved before settlers would consider moving to the area. The conclusion of the Black

Hawk War put an end to doubts about safety, legality, and stability.

Second, the development of the Erie Canal-Great Lakes transportation system permitted the transport of large shipments of grain from the new farm regions of the Middle-west to the eastern markets. While the opening of these new markets brought prosperity to the producers in lands served by the new transportation system, such as Ohio and western New York, it threatened the profitability of agricultural production in New England because New England farms were less fertile and were considerably smaller than farms farther west. Because eastern farmers could not compete with the large volume of produce from the West, they were forced to sell their land and either change occupations or migrate to states farther west.

Thus, the transportation development which was instrumental in developing new markets for the grain producers of the West also was able to give the farmers of the East an opportunity for recovery by giving them cheap transportation to the rich lands of northern Illinois, which had been surveyed and made available for purchase at minimum government price. It was these eastern farmers who converted their lands into available cash and who became the "substantial" farmers in De Kalb County, Illinois.

The successful completion of the Black Hawk War along with improved transportation permitted this new class of

substantial farmers to be the first settlers on the prairies of northern Illinois. They were, in fact, experienced farmers, virtually transplanted from the East, prosperous enough to bring their own oxen, farming implements, and household furniture with them to the new country.

Because these settlers were able to transport the accoutrements of their former life with relative ease, the foundations of their society were reestablished rapidly and fairly easily. The process was not slow as had been the case with settlers in the southern part of the state. The new settlers had cash and could move their families to the new country, enter the land, and build, within several years at least, a comfortable residence.

In the chapter on land entry it is clear that these settlers were not content to enter land only for subsistence farming but anticipated selling surplus crops through trading centers, such as Chicago, for transshipment to the eastern part of the United States and abroad. Moreover, they bought more land than they could farm even for immediate commercial purposes because land was inexpensive, and they had confidence that land values would increase. In this new civilization every man could be a speculator. De Kalb County was square in the middle of a moneyed economy.

This study explores the problem of reconstruction of a new agricultural society by focusing on the history of a single county called De Kalb in northern Illinois, from its

founding up to the beginning of the Civil War. The terms "frontier" and "pioneers" are used rather loosely to define that period when the first generation of settlers struggled to reestablish in a new county the values of an older section of the country. The basic patterns of values and social structure with which this study is concerned seemed sufficiently similar to those in many other counties to warrant the conclusion that, in fundamental ways, De Kalb County is typical of many new counties in northern Illinois. Indeed, the very name "De Kalb" is applied to several other counties in several other midwestern states. All counties have unique features that defy the term "typical," but this one does exemplify a rich and important county in a new farming frontier in the nineteenth century.

If optimism for the future ran high in De Kalb County, it was rooted in an optimism that, in the country as a whole and on a local level, opportunity rested on solid social foundations that would ensure that the rewards of labor would be protected and secure, that contracts were enforceable, that all could live safely under a system of law and justice. And, as we shall see, the citizens of the county would see that these pillars of society would be established early and maintained with zeal no matter what the cost.

In the chapters to follow, I have analyzed the elements of the county's culture and social structure as a reaction

to frontier conditions as they existed in the earliest days of the county. The arrangement of chapters is essentially thematic but within a chronological framework. "Physical Setting" sets the stage by describing how the land of De Kalb County, Illinois, was formed. "After Black Hawk" begins with a description of the differences between county settlement in the southern part of the state and county settlement in the north. Those who settled in De Kalb County were generally well-off farmers with developed social values who had been encouraged to leave the East for richer and cheaper lands of the West. But the counties of the northern section could only become settled after the removal of the Indian tribes, and only then could land entry proceed in an orderly fashion. The chapter on Demography will help in understanding the population makeup of the county. "Land Entry" explores how, in 1843, the pioneers first entered land in De Kalb County and the factors that, based on experience in the East, influenced their decision. "Farm Making" continues the story of early life on the farming frontier which expresses hope for the future based on experiences of a former life in the East. "Transportation" shows how a county population lived amid constant agitation for improved transportation to develop the economic level of the individual. Cultural values were behind these rising expectations. The same set of values is displayed in the chapter on "Crime" which clearly indi-

cates community problem-solving efforts at work in the absence of established institutions to uphold law and order. The chapter entitled "The Written Word" reinforces the theme that the farming frontier was composed of substantial farmers with established social values that were different from those who first settled the southern counties of the state. There could never be a market for books and periodicals in De Kalb unless there was a prior demand for such items.

CHAPTER I

PHYSICAL SETTING OF DE KALB COUNTY

If we are to consider the earliest days in the development of a county in northern Illinois, then perhaps it is better to start at the very beginning of time, when the forces of nature combined to form the rich land surface of the county. It was upon this rich prairie land surface that farmers from the East would settle. Each came with expectations that the new land would return economic rewards and that social development could proceed in an orderly fashion. Before tracing the geological development of the county, it would be useful to place De Kalb in its proper geographic setting.

De Kalb County was organized March 4, 1837, from part of Kane County. It was named for Johann Kalb, called Baron de Kalb (1721-80), a German officer who served in the Revolutionary War and was killed at Camden, South Carolina.

The county is located in the prairie lands of northern Illinois within the great corn belt. (See Figure 1.) It is in the second tier of counties south of the Wisconsin line and about midway between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River. The cities of Rockford, Elgin, and Dixon all lie within a radius of fifty miles from the city of Sycamore,

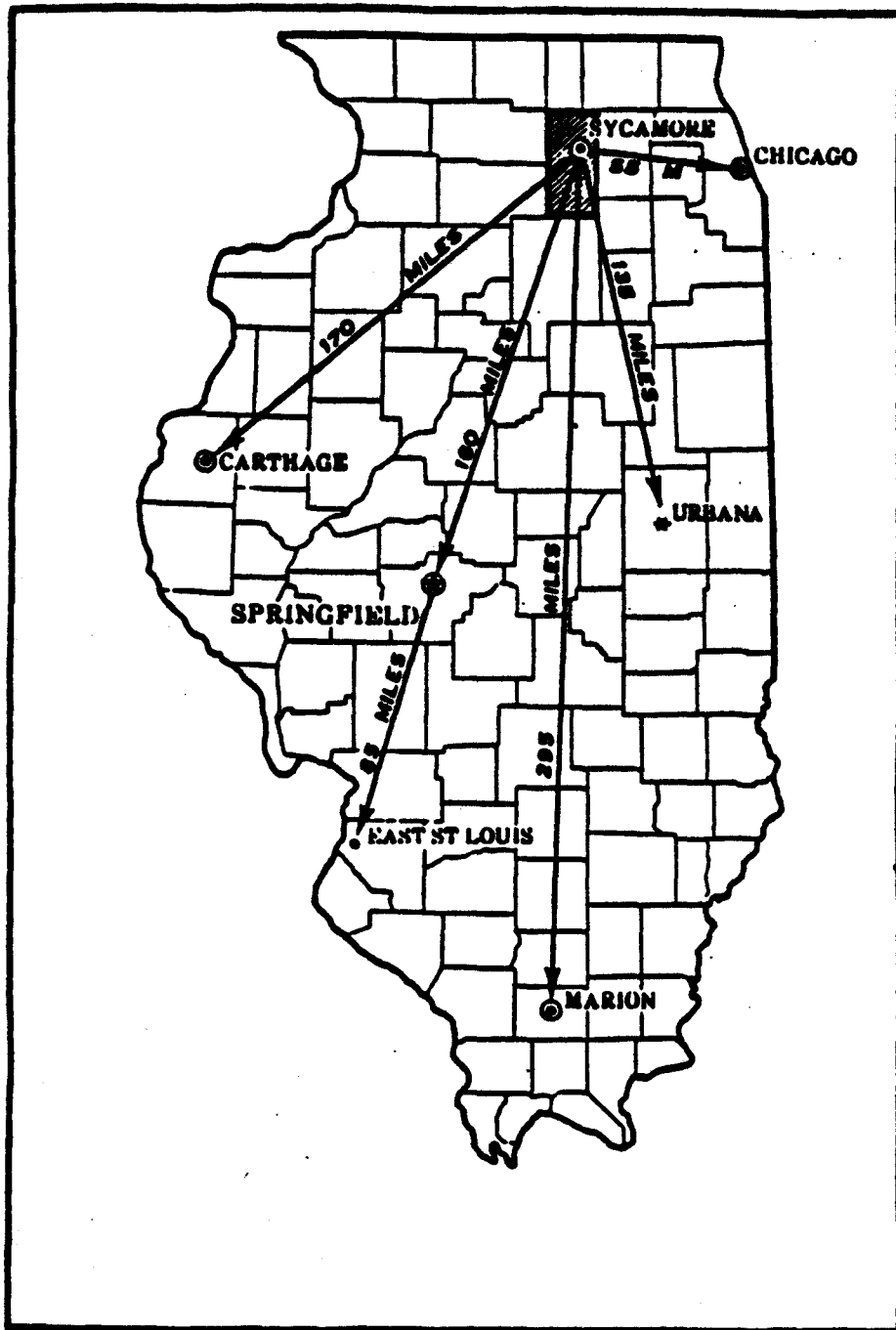


Figure 1. Location of De Kalb County in Illinois.

which is the county seat.

The county is 18 miles broad and 36 miles long; the total area is 638 square miles. It occupies the elevated ground between two well-known rivers, the Fox and the Rock. The Fox empties into the Illinois River at Ottawa, Illinois, the Rock into the Mississippi River at Rock Island, Illinois.

Almost all the bedrock of De Kalb County is sedimentary in origin. For long periods of geologic time, the area was covered by oceans, and vast amounts of sediment were washed down from the surrounding lands into the seas and consolidated into various strata of sedimentary rock. Some of those strata are very thick and, with few exceptions, are horizontally bedded.¹

Much of the bedrock of Illinois is made of rock which was deposited during the Paleozoic era. A map prepared by the Illinois State Geological Survey showing a cross-section of the bedrock along the third Principal Meridian, recorded the nature of the bedrock to a depth of five thousand feet. (See Figure 2.) The youngest bedrock of De Kalb county is of the Ordovician period, and the glacial drift rests on the rocks of that age.²

The Sandwich Fault, a break in the strata of the bedrock in which layers of different ages are found side by side, cuts across the southern third of De Kalb County. (See Figure 3.) It enters in the southeastern corner and

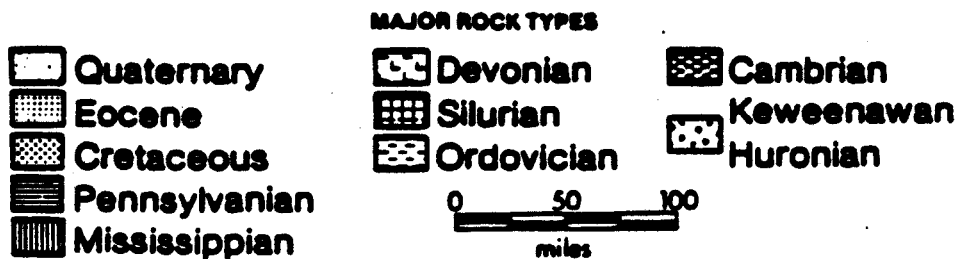
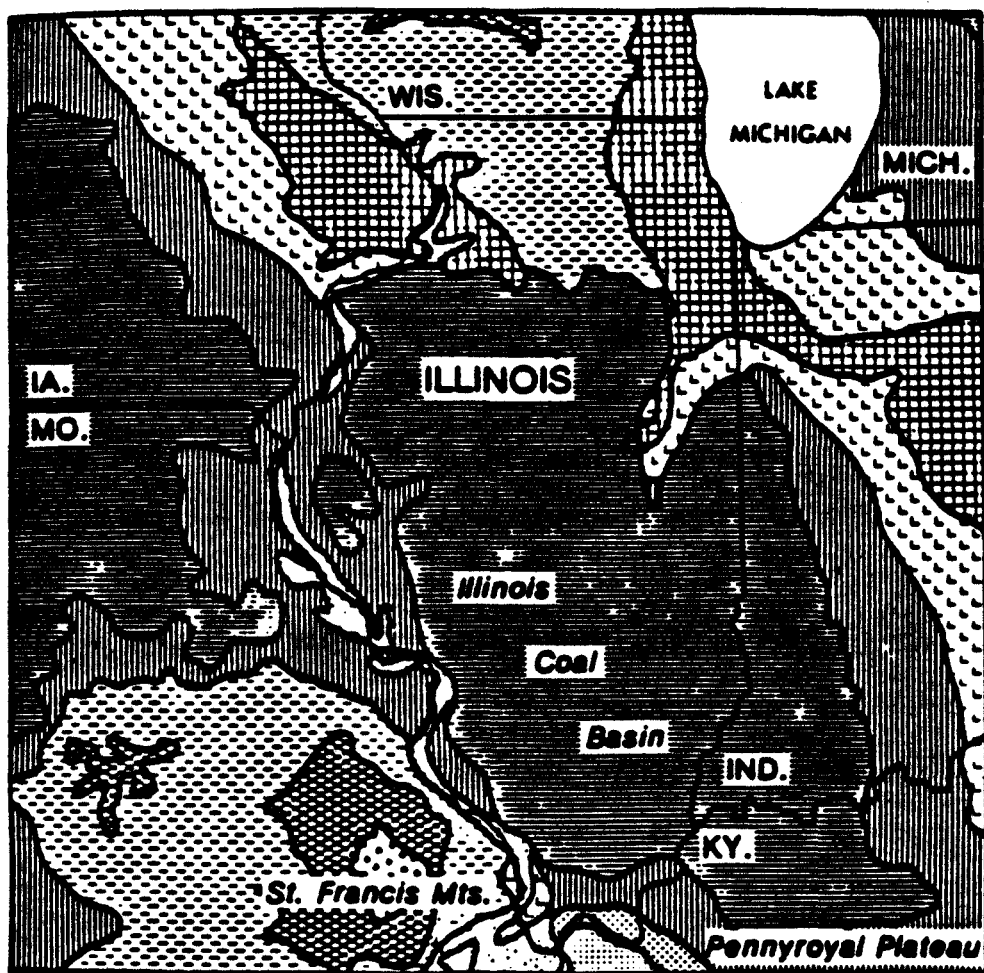


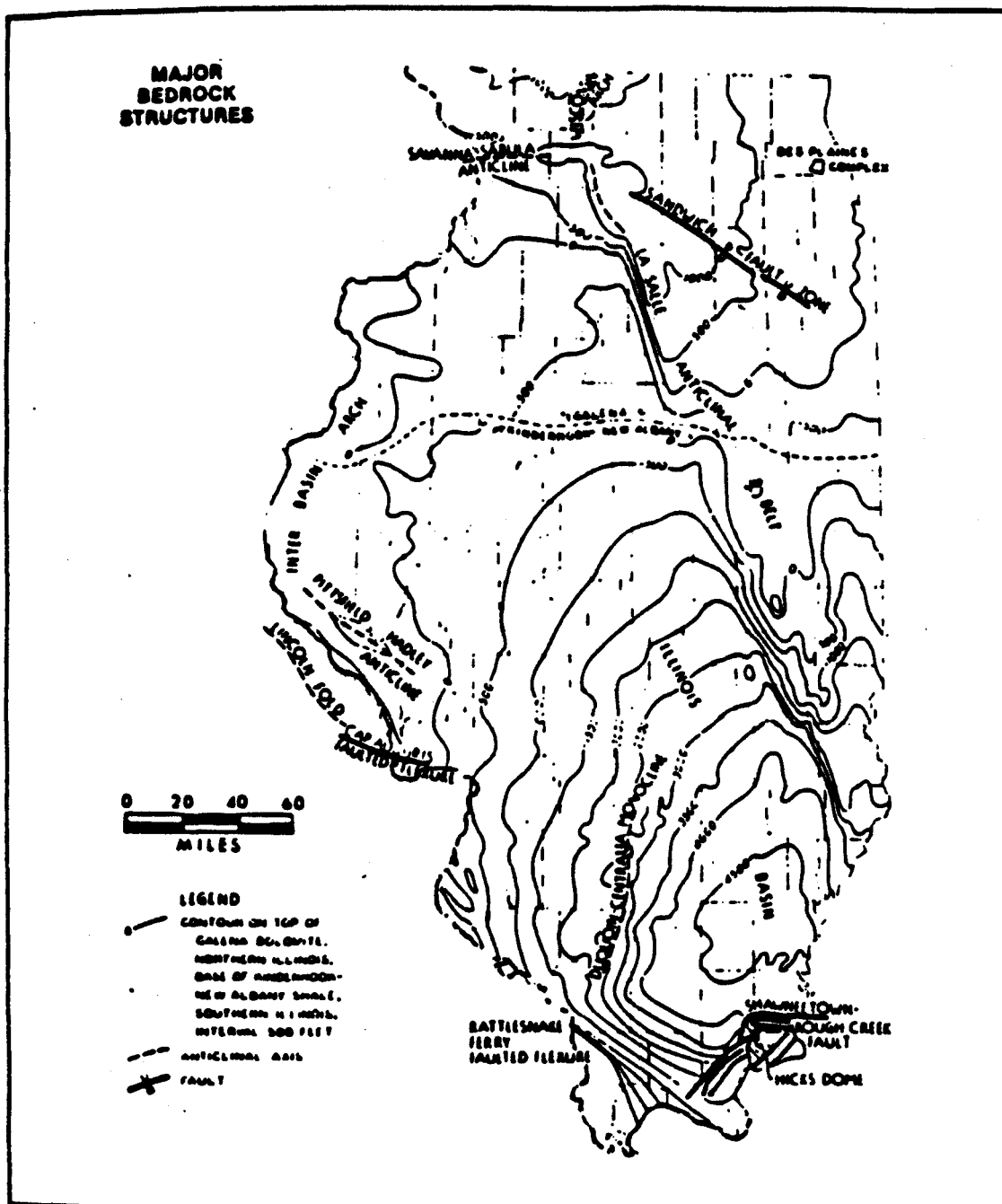
Figure 2. Major Rock Types in Illinois and Vicinity.
 Source, Leland Horberg, Bedrock of Illinois, Bulletin 73
 (Urbana: Illinois State Geological Survey, 1950).

trends in a northwesterly direction. On the southwest side of the fault lie rocks of the Cambrian period, the oldest of the geological ages which began some six hundred million years ago, while on the northeasterly side are the younger Ordovician strata, some of them a mere 425 million years old. The Ordovician bedrock consists of dolomite and limestone, along with some sandstone, shale, and siltstone formations.³ Some of the limestones make a fine natural cement, while St. Peter sandstone forms the basis of the Illinois glass industry. Although neighboring counties exploit these mineral resources, they lie too deeply buried under De Kalb to justify their extraction. Both De Kalb's contours and its wealth derive from much more recent geological events, the glaciations of the Pleistocene Epoch during the last two million years.

Glacial Period

More than 90 percent of Illinois was overridden by glaciers during the past 100,000 years, and the last of the glacial ice was still present in the Northeast less than 15,000 years before the present. Earlier glaciations, reaching back to more than a million years ago, have had their most obvious manifestations wiped out by time or by later ice invasions. (See Figure 4.)

The landscape of preglacial De Kalb County was vastly different from the present landscape. Prior to the Pleistocene period, the bedrock and the resultant soil of



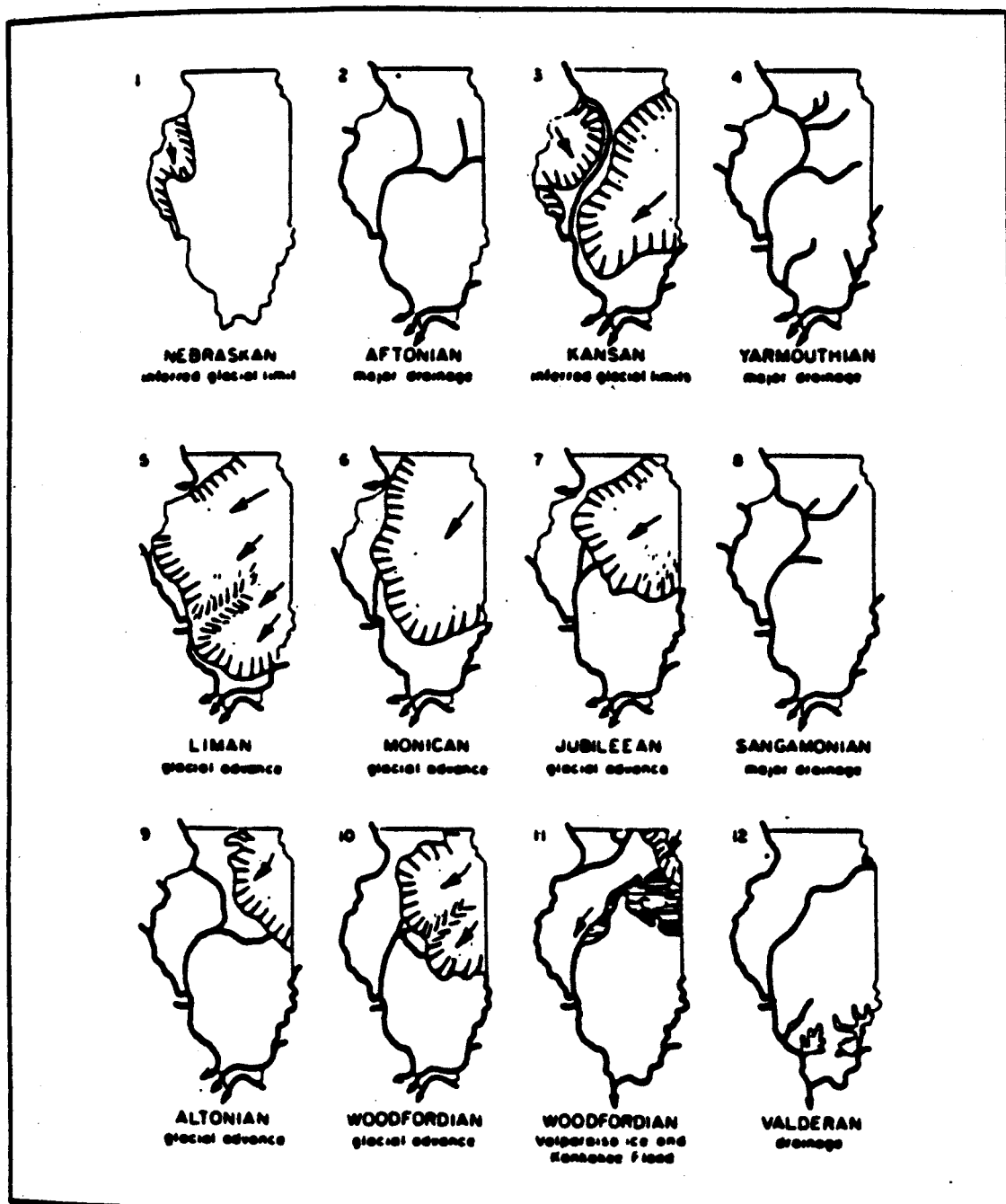


Figure 4. Glacial Stages and Drainage in Illinois. Source, H. B. Willman and J. C. Frye, Pleistocene Stratigraphy of Illinois (Urbana: Illinois State Geological Survey, 1970).

the Pennsylvanian period were undergoing weathering and erosion and had developed a cover of vegetation tolerant to the soil and climate of that time. The successive glaciers which invaded Illinois and De Kalb County altered the existing landscape by covering many areas with fifty to two hundred feet of glacial drift. Former stream valleys and other irregularities of terrain were smoothed over and covered with till. It is on that glacial drift that the period of human occupancy in De Kalb County has taken place.

The basic features of De Kalb County are largely the product of early Wisconsin glaciation. Beneath the Wisconsin drift, the Illinois drift is found in considerable strength.⁴ (See Figure 5.)

Following the retreat of the Illinoisian ice, there was a period of loess deposition known as the Sangamon interglacial epoch, which was terminated by the Iowan glaciation. The Iowan glaciation is important to De Kalb County because of the great amount of loess deposition which occurred toward the close of the period. This was followed by a period of weathering known as the Peorian interglacial epoch. The Peorian epoch was terminated by the early Wisconsin glacial stage. To these successive advances and recessions of glacial ice, but especially to the Wisconsin glacier, northern Illinois owes much of its morainal landscape.

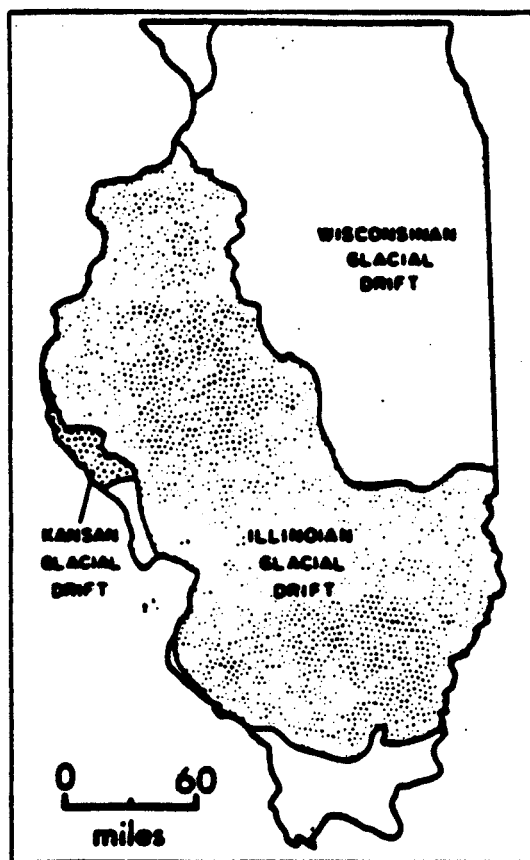


Figure 5. Glacial Drift in Illinois. Source, Guide to the Geologic Map of Illinois (Urbana: Illinois State Geological Survey, 1961).

Moraines

There are in De Kalb County portions of several moraines of the early Wisconsin glacial period. That period of glaciation opened with the advance of the Wisconsin ice and the deposition near the central part of the state of the Shelbyville moraine, a terminal moraine which marks the farthest advance of the Wisconsin ice sheet into Illinois.

Following the deposition of the Shelbyville moraine and the retreat of the ice, the following sequence of moraine deposition occurred: (1) readvance of the glacier and the deposition of the Bloomington moraine, followed by the recession of the ice; (2) short advancement of the ice and the deposition of the Cropsey moraines which were formerly considered to be a part of the Bloomington moraine system but are presently thought to be a separate and smaller system.⁵ (See Figure 6.)

The Bloomington moraine is one of the larger moraines of the Wisconsin glacial age, and is the most prominent relief feature in De Kalb County. The moraine enters the county on the east and continues westward across the county.⁶ The Cropsey moraine and the Farm Ridge moraine are part of the later Wisconsin ice age, both entering the county from the east and forming inner ridges relative to the Bloomington moraine.

The surface left by the Bloomington moraine is gently

undulating. The range in altitude of the moraine in De Kalb County is between 875 and 975 feet.⁷

Many low hills covering several acres rise from five to twenty feet above the intervening terrain. In many places the retreat of the glaciers has left no drainage for small basins five to ten feet in depth and occasionally occupying several acres. These wet places, which appear on the original surveyor's map, are characteristic of the more northerly prairie country of Illinois and Iowa.⁸ They inhibited settlement because they had to be drained before the land was fit for cultivation.

The average thickness of the glacial drift on the Bloomington moraine is approximately 150 feet, though rarely exceeding two hundred feet in any area.⁹ The soil of the moraine is lighter in color and contains more sand than does the soil of the intermorainal areas.¹⁰

The remaining moraine in De Kalb County, the Cropsey moraine, is relatively insignificant in the total relief. This moraine rarely rises more than fifteen feet above the surrounding terrain; it possesses gentle back slopes, and the drift is thinner than on the Bloomington moraine.

The position of the moraine is significant because each marginal moraine marks a long pause in the general movement of the ice sheet. As the melting marginal ice dropped its load, a steady advance of ice throughout the mass constantly brought a new supply of debris to the place

of marginal release, which determined the present type of surface material. An esker, which is a long, narrow ridge of coarse gravel deposited by a stream flowing in an ice-walled valley or tunnel in a decaying glacial ice sheet, is found in the county. It is about one and a quarter mile in length and is known as the "Devil's Backbone."¹¹

Most of the surface materials in De Kalb County are the product of glacial activity. So recent has been the retreat of the glacier from this area that weathering and stream erosion have modified only slightly the original post-glacial landscape.

There are three major types of surface materials within the county: glacial till, stratified glacial drift, and loess. The former two are of glacial origin. Till is a mixture of earth material deposited directly by the glacier as it melts. It consists of bedrock fragments and other loose debris acquired through the process of glacial erosion and transported to the marginal zone of melting; an unsorted mixture of material found in moraine formations.¹² Stratified glacial drift is the material deposited by glacial melt water beyond the glacial ice. It differs from glacial till in that it is deposited by water, not ice. It is stratified, and this material is sorted. Washout is defined as fine material bordering the outer edge of an end moraine.

Loess is wind-deposited silt. It occurs throughout

De Kalb County as a surface veneer, covering rough deposits of till and much of the sand and gravel in the county. It presents a rounded surface, ranging from two to five feet in thickness within the county. The loess was derived primarily from nearby areas of fine-grained washout and perhaps to a smaller extent from exposed areas of glacial till.¹³

The initial effect of glaciation was to add to, rework, and redistribute the unconsolidated earth materials overlying the bedrock. Whether by the weight and passage of the ice itself, or by the vast amounts of running water from melting ice, these earth materials filled in valleys and formed a new surface even higher than the crests of the bedrock hills. This new surface is much smoother than the surface it replaced, and is virtually free of stream valleys. This new surface is, of course, the surface that attracted the early settlers.

Climate

The climate of De Kalb County is favorable to the activity of northern Illinois agriculture. Since the area of the county is small, there is little weather difference as a result of latitudinal and longitudinal spread. Its climate is of the continental type, with warm summers and cold winters. The average date of the last killing frost in the spring is about May tenth. Records show that this part of the state receives 28 percent of its annual rain-

fall in the spring months, 32 percent in the summer, and 26 percent in the fall. Relative humidity ranges between 72 and 75 percent in the winter months and 64 and 68 percent in the summer.¹⁴ Temperature, rainfall, and winds would be regarded as the chief components of the climate of an area. In a county such as De Kalb, two factors, rainfall and temperature, are of the greatest importance to economic welfare in terms of agriculture.

There are two distinct seasons in the climate of De Kalb County, winter and summer. Summer, in many cases, is marked by periods of high humidity, as indicated above, while the winter season is often characterized by rapid changes of temperature. In some years spring barely materializes, and the transition between winter and summer is abrupt and sharp. Generally, the fall season is more distinct than is spring and is characterized by periods of warm, cloudless days which are highly important to the area in drying out the crops which are not harvested until late September and October.

Over a period of forty years (1901-1941), the average temperature in De Kalb in January was twenty-two and three-tenths degrees F., and in July was seventy-three and three-tenths degrees F. The highest temperature ever recorded was 109 degrees F., and the absolute minimum was twenty-six degrees below zero F.¹⁵

During this forty-year period, the growing season had

averaged 151 days. This length of growing season is admirably suited to corn, soybeans, and oats, which are the principal crops raised in the county.¹⁶

There is no climatic factor which varies so much locally as does the length of the growing season; moreover, due to air flow, a depression in the land may have later frosts in the spring and earlier frosts in autumn than has the land immediately adjacent. The forty-year record in De Kalb County indicates that the average date of the latest killing frost was May tenth; the average date of the earliest killing frost was October sixth¹⁷.

Precipitation is of special significance to an agricultural area such as De Kalb County in terms of quantity and periodicity. There, as well as in most of Illinois, the maximum rainfall occurs during the growing season (April to September).¹⁸ In De Kalb County, over a period of forty years, the annual rainfall has averaged 33.86 inches.¹⁹ For the same period, the maximum precipitation has occurred in September, 4.10 inches. May and June are the months having the next greatest amounts of rainfall, with 3.88 and 4.00 inches respectively. February, with 1.42 inches of precipitation, is the month of lowest rainfall, not including any snowfall.²⁰

Snow is an erratic factor in the climate of De Kalb County. In some cases a winter season may be almost without snow, whereas a twelve-inch snow is not unusual in

other years. A snow rarely remains on the ground for more than several weeks before it is melted away as the result of temperature change. Over a period of fifty-three years (1896 to 1949) the snowfall records of the area reveal a few interesting facts: June, July, and August were the only months free from snow; both May and September have had reported traces of snow occasionally during that period of time. February, with an average of 7.5 inches of snowfall, averaged the maximum amount for any month. In descending order of amount of snowfall, January has averaged 7.3 inches, December 6.1 inches, March 5.4 inches, November 2.3 inches, April 1.0 inches, and October .3 inches.²¹ This snow cover has real value to the farmer. As it melts it adds moisture to the soil and water to the underground water table, which is a source of well water.

Soils

The soils of De Kalb County are the single greatest resource of the area. The wealth of both the farmer and urban population is, in part, the result of the fertility and productivity of its soils. The De Kalb County soils are perhaps not so fertile as the Chernozema soil of the Great Plains but are more productive as a result of higher and more favorable rainfall.²²

Most of De Kalb County soils are transported soils of glacial origin. The parent materials from which soil had been formed, and is still being formed, is a mantle of

glacial till covered by loess. The time elapsed since the parent material was deposited has been a relatively short period in earth history, and the weathering of the parent material had not been so rapid as in areas of greater rainfall and higher temperature. The loess cover varies in thickness but is thicker in the western part of the county.²³

In De Kalb County several types of soil predominate. The first type is the Saybrook-Drummer-Octagon soil association. This type of soil is found on gently rolling, irregularly shaped ridges and drainageways on the glacial till plain.²⁴ It was formed from silty material and accounts for about 48 percent of the county soil. The main problems in managing these soils are improving drainage, controlling water erosion in the drainage areas, and maintaining fertility.²⁵

The second soil group is the Drummer-Flanagan-Catlin soil association which consists of broad, gently undulating, irregular ridges and drainageways on a large till plain. This soil association occupies about 24 percent of the county, and is well suited to all cultivated crops commonly grown in the county. All of the soils in this group have high available water capacity and are high in organic-matter content. The main concerns in managing these soils are controlling water erosion in the sloping areas, improving drainage, and maintaining fertility.

These grassland soils are dark in color and occur on nearly level to sloping upland areas. Flanagan soil was formed in three to five feet of loess over loam to silty clay loam till. Catlin soil occurs on low, gently to moderately sloping knolls, whereas Flanagan occurs on nearly level loess-covered till plains. Drummer soil, which is a nearly level, poorly drained silty clay loam soil, occurs in association with all soil groups.²⁶ A high percent of this soil association is tillable and is used to raise corn and soybeans, but wheat, hay, and some oats can be grown.²⁷

A third type of soil found in De Kalb County is the Drummer-Elburn-Batavia group. Broad, nearly level and gently sloping or water-worked drift areas often show this type of soil association. Also in the soil association, in the vicinity of De Kalb and Malta, is an area of circular to elliptical, raised, flat-topped mounds which rise five to fifteen feet above the surrounding areas and are commonly surrounded by low-poorly drained soils. The soils in this association are well suited to all crops in the county.²⁸

In general, permeable soils are leached of lime and other soluble minerals much more rapidly than slowly permeable soils. Soils develop more rapidly under forest than under prairie vegetation. Steep soils develop more slowly than less strongly sloping soils because of greater runoff

and less movement of water through the soil. Soils generally develop more rapidly in a humid climate than in a dry one.²⁹

This description of soils in present day De Kalb County was beyond the comprehension and empirical knowledge of the early settler. He had heard that the soil was better than the worn-out, thin topsoils of the East, but the soil of Illinois was thick and fertile beyond expectations.³⁰ The sand and gravel found in De Kalb County was of little importance to the early settler but is part of the current physical description. This material was deposited by melt-water, which resulted from the melting of the glacier that advanced into the area during the ice age. The present sand and gravel industry in the county is confined to the valleys of the south branch Kishwaukee River and east branch of the Kishwaukee River.³¹

Following the south branch Kishwaukee River from the township of Shabbona, a survey reported that at the headwaters large amounts of fine-grained silty outwash occur, but sand and gravel are rare. Farther downstream, gravel is found and estimated to be between ten and twenty feet thick. A short distance farther reveals only glacial till beneath less than eight feet of silt. The glacial epoch added \$521,000 in mineral wealth to De Kalb County in 1962. This was derived from production of stone, gravel, and sand.³²

Vegetation

The native vegetation in De Kalb County is post-glacial in development. As has already been described, the ice sheet covered the area with great amounts of glacial drift and melt-water, and the ice invasion was largely instrumental in destroying the pre-glacial vegetation of the area. With the retreat of the ice and a modification of the climate, the well-known prairie and wooded groves of northern Illinois came into being.

The natural vegetation of the county may be broadly classified as grasses and timber, with the grasslands occupying a far greater area than the timbered groves. From descriptions of the area by early settlers it has been inferred that, except for the relatively few groves of trees found in the county, grass blanketed most of the land. The grasslands included parts of the moraines as well as most of the inter-morainal tracts.

In the type of climate existing in De Kalb County, botanists have assumed that big and little bluestems (Andropogon gerardi and Andropogon scoparius) were the dominant species, although the original prairie vegetation is thought to have consisted of nearly two hundred different species.³³

The two grasses mentioned probably covered 70 percent of the prairie. Homer Sampson writes:

Most of the pioneer area on the older glaciated part of the state south of the latitude of Mattoon had become covered by tall bluestem, but a large part of the prairie region in the younger glaciated area north of that latitude was not dry enough for tall bluestem and abounded in numerous sloughs of bulrush and slough grass.³⁴

Centuries of prairie grass growth over the county added to the thick mantle of grass humus and contributed greatly to the fertility of the county soils. But it also added to the problem of breaking the sod for the first planting.

Drainage

The Kishwaukee River is the largest river in the county. On all of the early maps of the county and in its early records, this river is designated as the Sycamore River. Kishwaukee is said to be the Indian name for the sycamore tree, and the river took its name from the fact that when the county was first settled a few scattered groves of these trees were found upon its banks.

The Kishwaukee rises in the township of Shabbona in the eastern part of the county. Its south branch flows through the city of De Kalb, passing near Genoa and Kingston, entering the Rock River at Milford in Winnebago County. The east branch of this river rises in the township of Cortland and enters the main stream in the township of Mayfield. Deer Creek in Genoa Township, Slough Creek in Kingston, and Owens Creek in South Grove are all minor branches of the Kishwaukee River. A number of small streams have their origin near the southern boundary of the

county. The Indiana and Little Creek and the Big Rock and the Little Rock Creek flow southward from the prairie in wet season. These creeks give life to the scattered groves which are part of the Illinois prairie. Although the groves are now diminished in size, the old county histories relate that along the banks of the rivers and creeks there was "one continuous forest, which was the main source of supply for fuel, fencing, and timber for land owners of the county."³⁵ Trees were cut and groves diminished in size until the railroads were forced to bring timber supplies from miles away.

Rectangular Survey

The method of survey of all lands west of the Appalachian Mountains was applied in De Kalb County. The rectangular survey or the basic subdivision of land by townships and ranges was adopted by the United States Government in 1785.³⁶ The basis of the system was the establishment of north-south "principal meridians" and east-west "base lines" intersecting the principal meridians at right angles. The base line used for most surveys in Illinois extends east-west just south of St. Louis, Missouri, and Centralia, Illinois. The third principal meridian is the only survey meridian which extends the entire length of the state. It passes near the cities of Rockford, Bloomington, Centralia, and Cairo. Surveys were made independently from each principal meridian, and irregularities in township

boundaries occur where surveys from the two principal meridians meet.³⁷

Under the rectangular or grid system, surveyors worked on north-south or east-west lines, and property ownership is based on townships six miles square, each having thirty-six sections of 640 acres. The sections are divisible into squares and rectangles, and any field can be exactly located by a universal system of numbering and description. The Congress required that surveys precede the sale of public lands, after which transactions were handled at government land offices.

With the establishment of a land office in Dixon, Illinois, the prairie land which had been disputed for centuries would, within several years, support a viable social order that could produce food for the growing population of the entire country.

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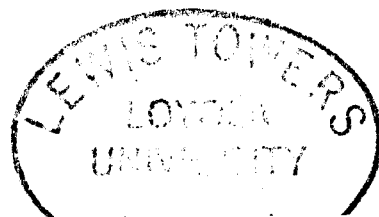
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CHAPTER II

AFTER BLACK HAWK . . .

COUNTY GROWTH IN NORTHERN ILLINOIS, 1832-1840

The settlement of Northern Illinois coincided with two important developments which gave this section of the state a social history unique to the state as a whole. First, the potential farm had to be free from threats of harassment from the Indians, and, second, the land had to be legally available for the farmer to buy. Thus, the Indian problem had to be solved before settlers would consider moving to the area. The conclusion of the Black Hawk War put an end to doubts about safety, legality, and stability. Now the farmers from the East could move to the frontier of northern Illinois, establish a productive farm, and raise a family. Without this promise for the future, the area would remain a primitive frontier.

In this chapter, the development of northern Illinois will be traced, as it offers an interesting opportunity for the study of westward expansion and the influences that determined the character and location of settlement. This part of the state can be defined as including most of the state north of an east-west line, beginning on the west at the juncture of the Rock and Mississippi rivers, to the

eastern border of Illinois south of Will County. Owing to its location, the routes by which it was reached, its varied physiographic regions, its abundance of internal waterways, its stretches of woodlands, its extensive prairie, and the time taken for the frontier line to cross the state, we can expect to find within the limits of settlement a varied population.¹ The development, too, of the transportation facilities which served this area and the relationship of this development to that taking place within the area itself, form a part of this study.

Southern Illinois was settled earlier than the northern section because it was adjacent to states with existing population and because of the existence of established routes of travel from the East. Moreover, the Indian problem did not exist in the southern part of the state. In the earliest days, some thin settlement had begun to penetrate northward along the waterways of the state, along the Illinois and Sangamon Rivers and northward along the Mississippi River to Galena and the lead mines. These early settlers became a permanent part of the state's population, but at this early time they had not ventured far from the safety of the woodlands and river regions. Far to the north, expansion along the Rock River would be delayed until the Indian problem could be settled. The Indian barrier checked further movement into the far northern part of Illinois, and by the time that barrier had been

removed steam transportation on the lakes fostered a shift not only in the flow of pioneer travel from the East but also permitted a new and substantial farmer class to be first on the prairies that formerly were part of Indian territory.

The Erie Canal, opened to traffic in 1825, provided a highway which unlocked the door to the lake region and gave uninterrupted water communication from the Atlantic seaboard to the Old Northwest during seven months of the year. Not only did it stimulate and redirect the trend of migration to the shores of the Great Lakes, but it provoked the rapid rise of steam navigation which, in turn, quickened the westward trek and shortened by weeks the journey between the Chicago Portage and the East.²

Earlier, when settlement was largely confined to the southern half of the state, one could wagon to southern Illinois over primitive roads from the East or steamboat down the Ohio to Louisville, then by stage to Vandalia, or on to Shawneetown, or to St. Louis by water.³ Only after the Black Hawk War had been terminated in the northern part of the state would Chicago become the natural entry.

Traveled at times almost as heavily as the Great Lakes routes was the Chicago Road, which provided a highway to immigrants trekking westward. Long utilized by the Indians in their travels to and from Detroit, and known earlier as the Great Sauk Trail, it was but a horsepath as

late as 1820. In 1821, through a treaty with the Indians, the United States was granted the right to make and use the road, and in 1825 it was adopted by the Government as a postroad. Immigrants and travelers, who preferred to cross the southern peninsula rather than take the long and stormy lake route by way of Mackinac, landed at Detroit and followed the Chicago Road through Ann Arbor, Jackson, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph. From there, as early as 1834, they might continue by land through the dune country around the southern end of Lake Michigan to Chicago or take passage by steamer from Niles or St. Joseph across the lake. Others would use the Genesee Turnpike from the East, and the Michigan Road, leading up from the Ohio River across Indiana from the Southeast, to meet the Chicago Road, which for a time was one of the great thoroughfares of the western movement opening the gateway of Illinois at Chicago.⁴

Rivaling the Chicago Road in importance was the Vincennes Trace, leading up from the old French town of that name on the Wabash River. It stretched north to the village of Danville, through Iroquois County to the south end of Lake Michigan. It was used as early as 1829 by settlers from Indiana bound for the new counties of the northern and central parts of the state.⁵

As has been mentioned, the emigration from the East via the Great Lakes brought a new class of substantial farmers to the prairies of northern Illinois. Percy Bid-

well discusses the farm revolution in New England that stimulated the exodus from that area, which will be discussed later in the chapter.⁶ These displaced farmers converted their property into cash and began their journey to Illinois and the West to begin life anew.

And cash was needed. Clarence Danhof has shown that, in general, one thousand dollars was a minimum for establishing a prairie farm under conditions of the 1840s, which did not include moving expenses. For this reason it seems safe to say that the pioneers of the Illinois prairies were fairly substantial citizens when they reached the prairies of northern Illinois, different from those who earlier had settled in the southern part of the state.⁷

A map of the United States showing the distribution of population for the years 1816 to 1830 would show the effects of Indian removal as the land was occupied by settlers. In 1810 settlement beyond the Appalachian Mountains was limited to a zone along the Ohio River and its tributaries, the Cumberland, and the Tennessee. North of the Ohio settlement extended along the southern shore of Lake Erie, gradually edging south toward the central portion of the land. In the Ohio Valley settlement crossed into Indiana and spread up the Wabash River to the French village of Vincennes. A few settlers occupied the west bank of the Wabash River in Illinois, but most pioneer Illinoisians lived in the Mississippi valley in a series of

clusters around the mouth and lower valleys of the eastern tributaries of the Mississippi, the Big Muddy, and the Kaskaskia rivers.

By 1820, with British power removed from the Mississippi Valley, settlement spread along the river courses of the Old Northwest to the Indian boundary.⁸ To the southeast in the Illinois Territory, there were a few settlers as far north as Edgar County. Crawford County, with Palestine as a center of settlement, had 2,100 settlers at the time of Illinois' admission to the Union.⁹ South of Crawford, Russellville was the center of population in Lawrence County. Directly to the west of Wabash County was the English settlement of Albion in Edwards County, founded in 1814 by George Flower and Morris Birkbeck.¹⁰ Gallatin County, with Shawneetown on the Ohio River as its chief settlement, was the most populous county on the eastern side of the territory, having about 3,200 settlers in 1818.¹¹

At this time, northern Illinois was included in the Sac and Fox cession of 1804. It was a wilderness of alternating prairies, oak groves, rivers, and marshes and contained few inhabitants. The United States government had not surveyed any part of it.¹² By 1820 there was a settlement of some thirty farmers on Bureau Creek, which joins the Illinois River as it begins its southerly turn toward Lake Peoria. Farther up the Illinois, at Peru and

LaSalle, a few cabins could be found. In nearby Newark and Holderness Grove were sheltered a few more settlers.

Chicago, in the northeast corner of the territory, and Galena in the northwest were the principal settlements at the time.¹³ Far to the north in the lead regions near Galena, the first permanent white settlers were beginning to locate on the Fever River. Across the state a few were at Fort Dearborn, which had been rebuilt in 1816. The Military Trace, although laid out between the Mississippi and the Illinois rivers to just south of Ottawa, was almost unoccupied.

Wisconsin in 1820 was still largely Indian territory. There were a few hundred settlers outside of the lead counties. Small populations established the identity of Green Bay and Prairie du Chien. All else was wilderness.¹⁴ Indians occupied most of Iowa. There were some 1,000 Sacs and Foxes, about 1,000 Iowas, several thousand Ojecs, Pawnees, and Omahas in western Iowa, with roving bands of Sioux in the north.¹⁵

The Indian was the great factor in restraining immigration in northern Illinois. Hall recalled that fear of Indians was very common in the East, and for this reason few pioneers cared to risk their lives and property. The threat was real, for the few encroaching settlements irritated the Indians to the point that by 1827 there was fear of war with the Winnebago Indians. This not only discour-

aged further settlement in northern Illinois but resulted in actual retreat of settlers to locations outside of the area.¹⁶

It was known that the western lands were fertile and watered by fine streams, but it was also known that the inhabitants were exposed to hostile attacks by the Indians who occupied the region.¹⁷

Chicago as yet showed no sign of its coming greatness. Lake navigation by steam had not begun, nor had the settlers of Illinois approached near enough to Lake Michigan to look to Chicago for a market or a supply depot. The population of the little village did not number more than a hundred by 1825.¹⁸

The pioneer of the Illinois frontier to the south was still of the hunter type, very poor, most possessing nothing more than a few household goods, a pair of horses or a team of oxen.¹⁹ He changed little before 1830, for his cautious contact with the prairie of the South gave him little capital with which to attack the broader expanse of the North. He followed the woodlands north until the outbreak of the Black Hawk War in 1832. This date marks the beginning of a sudden and sharp transition. Before 1832, the settlement of the state was similar to that which occurred in the older states. After 1832, the origin of the population had changed, the sequence of settlement was different, and the farming problems that existed on the

wide, treeless expanse of northern Illinois required solutions unique to eastern farmers. New farming techniques, when understood and properly applied, would give rise to a new class of prosperous farmers from the East.

The causes leading to the movement to the West are many and varied. Certainly, one of the oldest causes was the restless spirit, a factor affecting men of any historical age. In the early history of the country, it was believed that conditions could be improved in the West where land was cheap and fertile and could be acquired and turned into productive farms with a reasonable effort on the part of the settler. Other forces that expelled men from their old homes or attracted them to the new might include such things as survival, escape from danger or discomforts, lack of economic success, or changing means of making a living.

Aside from these timeless forces, there were more immediate expelling forces in the eastern states that sparked a wave of new migration to northern Illinois. Farmers in the East found that the produce of their worn soil could not compete in eastern markets with the produce grown in the new lands of the Old Northwest. The produce of the West reached the East via the Erie Canal, completed in 1825, which brought the Great Lakes region into commercial reach of eastern markets. The new transportation routes also served another function. They provided a

safety valve for the thousands of eastern farmers dislodged by the competition who went west themselves rather than work at factory jobs.²⁰

Publicity was also an important cause of immigration to the West. Reports of the lead mines had been circulated, and even printed in German. Black Hawk's resistance, followed by his triumphant tour of the eastern cities, made him a newspaper sensation and filled columns with descriptions of the Indian country. Posters appeared in the East, which inflamed the spirit of adventure with promises of free land and wealth.²¹

Officers and soldiers who ranged through the Mississippi and Rock River valleys carried back with them glowing accounts of the beauty and fertility of the country. The troops acted as explorers of a large tract of land of which little was known.²²

From the foregoing causes, it seems reasonable that the influences bringing about the western movement in the early period were many and varied. The movement may be characterized as an attempt upon the part of the American farmer and laborer to widen his field and uplift his standard of living by taking advantage of the opportunities offered in the new West.

The movement of the pioneer across the continent has always been along the lines of least resistance. In length the State of Illinois is about four hundred miles, and the

parallels of latitude which mark its northern and southern extremities would include all the states from southern Massachusetts to southern Virginia. In the southern counties of the state, a great part of the settlers were from the southern states.²³

Buffalo was the great port for embarking for the West and continued to be so after the opening of steamer lines on the lake. During the year 1835, some eighty thousand people were counted leaving Buffalo, and during the summer season it was stated that twelve hundred people daily left the port bound for the West.²⁴

Different conditions influenced the timing of settlement in the river valleys of northern Illinois. The counties of the middle Illinois River valley were settled under the influence of earlier Sangamon River settlements; both Tazewell and Putnam counties were organized before 1830. Although the Sangamon River region was well settled by 1830, Mason County to the north of the Sangamon and between it and the Illinois River had few settlers and was not organized as a county until 1841. Mason had been surveyed as early as 1821, but owing to the fact that it was long regarded as a sandy, barren waste, few pioneers settled there.²⁵

Very few settlers came to the upper Illinois River Valley before the Black Hawk War. The exception was LaSalle County, which was organized in 1831. The principal

settlement in this county was Ottawa, which was established in 1823.

In this entire area, there was but one main wagon road north of the Illinois River. It was known as Kellogg's Trail and was opened in 1827, connecting Galena with Peoria and the settlements in southern and eastern Illinois. Here and there along the road lived a few people engaged in entertaining travelers and keeping stage teams. Indian trails traversed the country in many directions, one connecting Galena with Chicago, another between Dixon's Ferry and Chicago.²⁶

In the Fox River Valley, there were few settlements before the Black Hawk War. Naper's settlement in present DuPage County was the only one of importance, numbering 180 people by 1832. With the close of the War, pioneers ventured farther north along the Fox River and from 1834 to 1836 poured into the area. Naper's settlement, now important enough to warrant a changed name, became Naperville.²⁷

In Grundy County, located along the upper Illinois River and to the east of LaSalle County, a few settlers established themselves along the route of the projected Illinois and Michigan Canal. Construction on this canal was begun in 1836 and completed in 1848. Large-scale settlement within the county was delayed by land purchases by speculators in anticipation of economic gain generated by the canal. High prices for the land forced settlers to

look elsewhere, and the development of the county was not rapid.²⁸

Will County, to the east of Grundy and adjacent to Cook County on the south, had few settlers in 1832. Heavy land speculation, which began in June of 1835 in Chicago, caused speculators to move into Will County to buy land, and as a result many towns were plotted. Some of these small settlements did so well in attracting new settlers that by 1836 the county was organized.²⁹

By 1834, the line of settlement had reached Kane County, just to the east of De Kalb County. Cabins dotted the banks of the Fox River, collecting into small villages such as St. Charles and Aurora. Aurora was settled because the river was a source of water power, and by 1836 the settlement was well established as a frontier village. Elgin was also located on the Fox River because of water power and river transportation.³⁰

In spite of the fact that the settlers were forbidden to settle in the newly ceded Indian lands of Lake and McHenry counties, which were established in 1839 and 1836 respectively, until 1836, several claims were made in Lake County in 1834. Little settlement was made, however, until 1836, for the summer of '35 was cold, and many who came with the intention of settling in Lake County moved farther inland. By 1837, there were about three hundred people within the county limits.³¹ The same conditions prevailed

in McHenry County, established in 1836, where the population prior to that date consisted of twenty to thirty inhabitants. Most of these early settlers were from New England, a few from Virginia, the rest were foreigners.³²

These upper Fox River counties remained for the most part unpopulated except for land near the rivers. The river furnished power for mills and was the main channel of commerce. For this reason, river counties usually contained a greater population at an earlier period than did prairie counties.³³

The Rock River counties include Henry (1825), Rock Island (1831), Ogle, Whiteside, and Winnebago (1836), Boone (1837), and Lee (1839).³⁴ When the pioneer settlers became acquainted with these Rock River Valley counties, they moved in with great rapidity. The northern groups of these counties did not, during the early years, make much headway in settlement as those in the southern section of the valley. Boone County, on the northern boundary of Illinois, just west of McHenry County, had twenty-three voters in its largest village by 1836 and was organized in 1837. Before this date, Boone County was part of Winnebago County, organized in 1836.³⁵

In the 1804 Sauk Treaty, William Harrison, who was the governor of the Indiana Territory, obtained a fifteen-mile-square concession at the mouth of the Fever River. For years the lead diggings were quiet, but after 1818 miners

from Missouri and southern Illinois poled or pushed their keelboats up the Mississippi. The government owned the land, and until three years before the organization of Joe Daviess County in 1827 the only law in the camps scattered through the hills was an Army lieutenant on duty as superintendent of the Fever River lead district. The Fever River's name, which supposedly traced back to a smallpox epidemic in an Indian village, was considered bad advertising, and after 1827 both the river and the boom town at its head of navigation were called Galena.³⁶

In 1827 Jo Daviess County, in the far northwest corner of the state, was organized and the town of Galena surveyed and divided into lots.³⁷ Within this county, settlements such as Berreman, Vinegar Hill, Hanover, Council Hill, Elizabeth, Rush, and Scales Mound began to show growth. Of these, Elizabeth, on the Apple River, was the most important and in 1832 had a population of forty-five.³⁸

From this study of county settlement in the northern part of Illinois, it seems clear that this area did not go through the ordinary evolutionary stages that marked the growth of settlement in the eastern states, for nature had made clearings so vast in northern Illinois that the settler was confronted with a new set of problems which called for new solutions. Moreover, navigation of the lakes by steam reversed the order of settlement, and the men who were formerly in the rear guard now found themselves in the

front, propelled there by a direct line of water communication with the East. Northern Illinois counties such as De Kalb thus began a different kind of frontier development, one based largely on settlers with different expectations, experience, and economic resources.

The elimination of the Indians from northern Illinois opened a boom time for the northern counties as the foregoing brief survey suggests. However, the course of development in this area proved to be far different from the earlier riverine orientation or settlements in the southern part of the state. New environmental conditions, notably the extensive prairies and the immediate need of transportation, required solution. These very conditions would give birth to a different kind of pioneer and pioneering to find the solutions to these novel problems.

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³⁵Past and Present of Boone County, Illinois (Chicago: H.F. Kett and Co., 1877), p. 231.

³⁶Pooley, Settlement of Illinois, pp. 461-473; Reuben Gold Thwaites, "Notes on Early Lead Mining in the Fever River Region." Wisconsin Historical Collection XIII (1895); Joseph Schafer, "The Wisconsin Lead Region" (Madison: Wisconsin Domesday Book III (1952); B. H. Schockel, "Settlement and Development of the Lead and Zinc Mining Region of the Driftless Area with Special Emphasis Upon Jo Daviess County, Illinois," Mississippi Valley Historical Review (September 1917), 172-191.

³⁷History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois (Chicago: William LeBaron, 1859), p. 233.

³⁸Ibid, pp. 555-608.

CHAPTER III

LAND ENTRY IN SOUTH GROVE TOWNSHIP

This chapter will trace the changing attitude of the early settlers towards the open prairies of central and northern Illinois. This attitude would evolve from the earliest period with its strong resistance to farming on the prairie to an almost land rush entry pattern by 1843 after the removal of Black Hawk. The chapter will conclude with an investigation of the factors, if any, which influenced the settlers from the East in the selection of farm land in De Kalb County.

The settlement of the Illinois prairies by settlers from the forested East and South has been examined by many historians beginning with Boggess and Pooley early in the twentieth century.¹ Along with a later historian, they concluded that the prairie country was shunned by the first settlers, whose frontier technique was adjusted to a wooded country. The grasslands were avoided until the pressure of increasing population forced pioneers to adjust to this newer environment.²

Another advocate of the thesis of delayed prairie settlement lists reasons why prairies were unattractive to early settlers; the treeless character indicated poor soil

and denied the pioneer a material essential to the usual practices of frontier life; some prairies were poorly drained, while others lacked adequate drinking water; breaking of the thick sod was difficult; and the prairies were considered unhealthy.³ A recent study of the Old Northwest claims more simply that the pioneers invaded the prairies slowly because "the pioneer was of necessity a woodsman before he could be an agriculturist."⁴

In two other studies, one author makes no attempt to interpret the facts of Illinois settlement in terms of the thesis of delayed prairie settlement;⁵ the other attributes the lack of pioneer interest in northern Illinois to lack of access to navigable waterways, which made the region remote in terms of settlement, and to absence of timber.⁶

Prior to the work of Boggess and Pooley, academic opinion found nothing unusual in the settlement sequence of Illinois. The prairies were remote from the principal waterways and thus were inaccessible to settlers. Yet on land that could be reached, the lack of timber would be an inducement to settlement because the pioneers were spared the laborious task of clearing land.⁷ Another author wrote that in the 1830s some advocates of prairie settlement advised that the best soil was to be found in the interiors of prairies, "and it is found that the nearer you approach the middle of the prairie, the more fertile will you generally find the soil."⁸ Another contemporary observer wrote

that "the soil generally is better proportioned as you penetrate the prairie, provided it is not too far from wood."⁹ James Hall remarked in 1837 that "a farmer had better settle in the midst of a prairie, and haul his fuel and rails five miles, than undertake to clear a farm in the forest."¹⁰

Much of the old world lore and early Atlantic sea-board experience served the settler in good stead as he sought land in the West. The reputation of prairie soil was largely based on its color and on the type of vegetation which was produced. Black soil was the best, followed by red soil.¹¹ The color of soil was important, but, to some, soil quality could be determined by the types of trees which grew on it.¹² If the pioneers who faced the Illinois grasslands believed this, they had good reason to be depressed. To many, trees were common criteria for judging soils; thick growth usually indicated good soil and thin growth poor soil. "Deep-seated affinities for certain soils existed in the blood of European emigrants," who would find that nature could play queer tricks on men who put too great faith in past experience, or who expected the same soil to react the same way in different climates.¹³

Federal field survey notes, which often preserve the only contemporary data about vegetation, sometimes contained inaccuracies. Often it was a question of error or mistakes of a surveyor's judgement, or in some instances the field

notes were fraudulent. This was one of the charges that led to the dismissal of William Rector as surveyor of public lands in Illinois.¹⁴ Fortunately, the number of geographic variations in De Kalb County is so small that they can be verified through a comparison with contemporary descriptions of the land.

The writings of another historian, Terry G. Jorden, reveal the problem of interpreting the use of the word "prairie;" that is, are the prairies treeless or not? He points to the existence of a transition zone between timbers and prairie where woodlands are island-like, appearing in isolated groves and in strips along streams.¹⁵ There is total agreement on the difficulty of settling on the prairie without a solution to the problem of water, fencing, and transportation. The solution to these problems would be found in the windmill, barbed wire, and the railroad, but these would come later. There is every indication then that the prairies were not as completely bare of trees as we might believe but were rather of a mixed nature. Archer Hulbert wrote that the absence of trees was an almost unheard of condition in the Midwest. On the widest of Illinois prairies, "timber was seldom more than five miles distant from any pioneer trail."¹⁶ It seems that it was not the grasslands of northern Illinois that were avoided as much as the open prairies west of the 100th Meridian which were a different matter, and only

there did the real prairie problem begin.

In general, the Illinois prairie was characterized by an alternation of grassland and wooded areas. Timber appeared on the margins of individual prairies, and an occasional grove was found within the larger prairie. Individual prairie units varied greatly in size, ranging from the larger prairies in the northern part of the state covering hundreds of square miles to the southernmost counties that had less prairie land.

There were settlements in northern Illinois before the outbreak of the Black Hawk War. They were few in number and small in size, but they portrayed pioneer tendencies by their locations along streams or near groves of timber.¹⁷ Settlement followed the timber lands, along the streams, leaving the great prairies untouched. Settlements remained small and would show little growth for another decade because the area was inaccessible to the early pioneer. The isolated nature of the country would hinder development of any sort, and the settlement of the country was retarded. Sycamore, for example, which today is the county seat of De Kalb County, was in 1840 "a dreary little village" of a dozen houses, located at the edge of a sycamore grove.¹⁸ Since interior lands were the most distant from navigable waterways and other means of transportation, they usually were the least accessible to immigrants and had the least value to them and, as a result, were the last

to be sold for settlement.¹⁹ Because of the large proportion of prairies in the interior of northern Illinois, a contemporary observed that "open prairies, or those parts of the country which are now destitute of timber, being invariably the most distant from living streams, would of course, as a general rule, be the last to be settled, even if all the surface was alike covered with wood."²⁰

The value of land to settlers involved not only the matter of transportation facilities but also was influenced by additional factors. One such factor was the development of the self-scouring steel plow, developed in the 1830s, which solved the problem of breaking the prairie sod for the frontier farmer.²¹ Another factor was that northern Illinois was the last part of the state to have Indian tribes removed so that government surveying and sale of land could begin. It was the scene of the last Indian crisis in the Old Northwest Territory, the Black Hawk War, during which the Illinois frontier retreated briefly southward.²² The war in a real sense began in nearby Ogle County where the battle of Stillman's Run occurred. Here the troops under the command of Major Isaiah Stillman fired at some of the Indian peace envoys which was followed by a headlong rush toward the main body of Indians in the distance. Black Hawk, who had only forty men with him, ordered a suicide charge, whereupon most of the whites turned around and stampeded to Dixon's Ferry, twenty-five

miles to the rear. This panic led to exaggerated reports of Indian strength and made war inevitable. In the war, which could have been avoided, the state militia supported by a small number of regular army troops reorganized before leaving Dixon to pursue the outnumbered, fatigued, and hungry Indian families into Wisconsin.²³

The future of northern Illinois required that the Indians sign away their rights to the land they had taken from other Indians in earlier tribal wars. On September 23, 1833, the Indians signed a treaty at Chicago that promised them money and a tract of land as large as the one from which they were being evicted. This settlement gave the white man complete control of the future of the state.

Migration to the Illinois country was an adventurous and often hazardous undertaking. Travel by boat and wagon was slow, tiresome, and at many times dangerous. Passage down the Ohio River was easy, but as settlement spread northward in the state longer overland journeys by wagon were necessary to reach unoccupied land. With the development of transportation on the Great Lakes, travel to Illinois was suddenly made possible to thousands of immigrants from the East, and this new surge of settlers filled the northern and central sections of the state.

This new thrust of migration helped create a climate for land speculation, which was one of the causes of the

panic of 1837. The demand for land for settlement and speculation spread from Chicago, where downtown lots had increased 500 percent over 1832 prices, to the inland country, where speculators and some legitimate settlers plotted town sites and sold lots at spiraling prices.²⁴ Many in the East saw that there were fortunes to be made in western land, and no sooner was the discovery made than the price of land increased. It was pointed out that in a single year, 1836, an extent of territory as large as the combined states of New England had passed into the hands of the speculators.²⁵

Whatever the merits of speculation, the fact remained that a penalty had to be paid. President Jackson's Specie Circular sent land sales into a precipitous decline. This order, issued on July 11, 1836, required that after August fifteenth, the local land officials would accept only gold and silver in payment for public land.²⁶ As a result land values began to sag. In Illinois, wildcat banks closed, internal improvement projects folded, and land speculation ceased.

In varying degrees of intensity the depression extended over the years 1837 to 1843.²⁷ Land was lost, money was scarce, and business transactions were often performed by barter involving farm produce, cattle, and horses. Land claim squabbles added to an already chaotic condition, and only the inability of people to sell their property at

almost any price prevented the state from losing a large part of its population.²⁸

In Illinois, the Federal government disposed of the land by two methods. After 1814, as Indian titles were removed, foreign claims settled, and the survey of the land completed, land was offered for sale at various land offices established throughout the state. De Kalb County land was sold from the Dixon land office after the headquarters of the northwestern district was transferred from Galena in 1840.²⁹

By the other method, bounty land warrants were granted to those who had served in the War of 1812 and later in the Mexican War. It was not until 1842 that a law was enacted permitting the locating of warrants on any public land subject to private entry. Before this time warrants were given only for land entry on specific tracts of land. The holder of a warrant could then apply it on any land at a value of one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre in the state. The great volume of warrants issued and available on the open market depressed their price, and they never brought a full one dollar and twenty-five cents an acre.³⁰ Warrant prices fell as low as sixty cents per acre. Many warrants were purchased in the East and sent to the West where they could be sold to locators "swarming around land offices."³¹

Table 1 shows the number of cash and warrant sales by year in De Kalb County.

TABLE 1

CASH AND WARRANT SALES BY YEAR
SOUTH GROVE TOWNSHIP, DE KALB COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Year of Purchase	Number of Cash Sales	Number of Warrant Sales	Acres Sold		
			40	80	160
1843	4	0	2	2	0
1844	12	0	2	10	0
1845	11	0	9	2	0
1846	9	1	8	0	2
1847	12	0	6	6	0
1848	9	28	27	8	2
1849	1	56	26	25	6
1850	1	20	11	8	2
1851	2	1	1	1	1
1852	0	19	10	4	5
1853	6	175	99	65	17
1854	0	1	0	0	1

Source: State of Illinois, Public Domain Sales Land Tract Record Listing, Archives Division, 1982.

Since the price of military-bounty land warrants ordinarily was below the government's minimum price of one dollar twenty-five cents per acre, the speculator could make larger purchases of public lands than would have been possible under a policy of cash sales only. For the twelve years of land sales in South Grove Township in De Kalb County, there were 309 warrant sales versus sixty-seven for cash. There is little indication that the entryman used his purchase for speculation, although it is difficult to believe that farms of eighty or 160 acres could be farmed

by a single family. Many a veteran located his own warrant and made a farm. Warrant-brokers journeyed to the land-office towns and sold their wares to settler and speculator alike.³²

The main task of the study is to describe and, whenever possible, explain the initial evaluation by the settler of the Illinois prairie at a township level between 1843 and 1854. The opening date of the study marks the year when land was first sold in South Grove Township, De Kalb County, Illinois, and the terminal date indicates when all government-owned land had been entered.

South Grove Township has no large rivers, no elevated peaks, no deep and narrow valleys, but it does have rich, rolling prairies, dotted with a few small groves and watered by a few small streams. Within the township, slight morainic ridges are the only conspicuous features of relief. There is no permanent surface water in the township, although lack of sufficient slope permits accumulation of water after heavy rains.

The first settlers appeared in South Grove in 1838; the area was opened for sale by the Federal Government in 1843.³³ The location and sequence of all land entries in the Federal Land Office tract book are shown by year in Appendix A, and an examination of the entries indicates a striking pattern of land purchase.

By comparing these first land entries with a copy of

the original survey map of the township, we see that the earliest sales were exclusively near wooded groves and near the principal road. There was virtually no actual settlement in other parts of the township. These sales were to early settlers, securing what they assumed would be a valuable source of timber and access to the existing road. Figure 7 on the next page shows that the sales of 1849 and 1853 were remarkable for the large number of individual transactions.

Characteristically, most of these sales were either forty or eighty acres, with a small number of 160-acre units. The forty- and eighty-acre size probably involved actual settlers rather than the larger size, bought for speculation. The role of the local speculator is clearly evident in the list of entry names on the land tract record furnished by the archives of the State of Illinois³⁴, a role, Bogue has complained, that has been overlooked.³⁵

Appendix A indicates that the 1848-49 sales were clustered in the northern part of the township because new country roads, when built, would more easily intersect the Galena-Chicago road, shown in Figure 8, from this part of the area. This would provide better transportation for farm produce than from other locations in the township. The final year of large entry, 1853, almost completed sales for remaining available land, which was located in the southern section of the township. That speculators

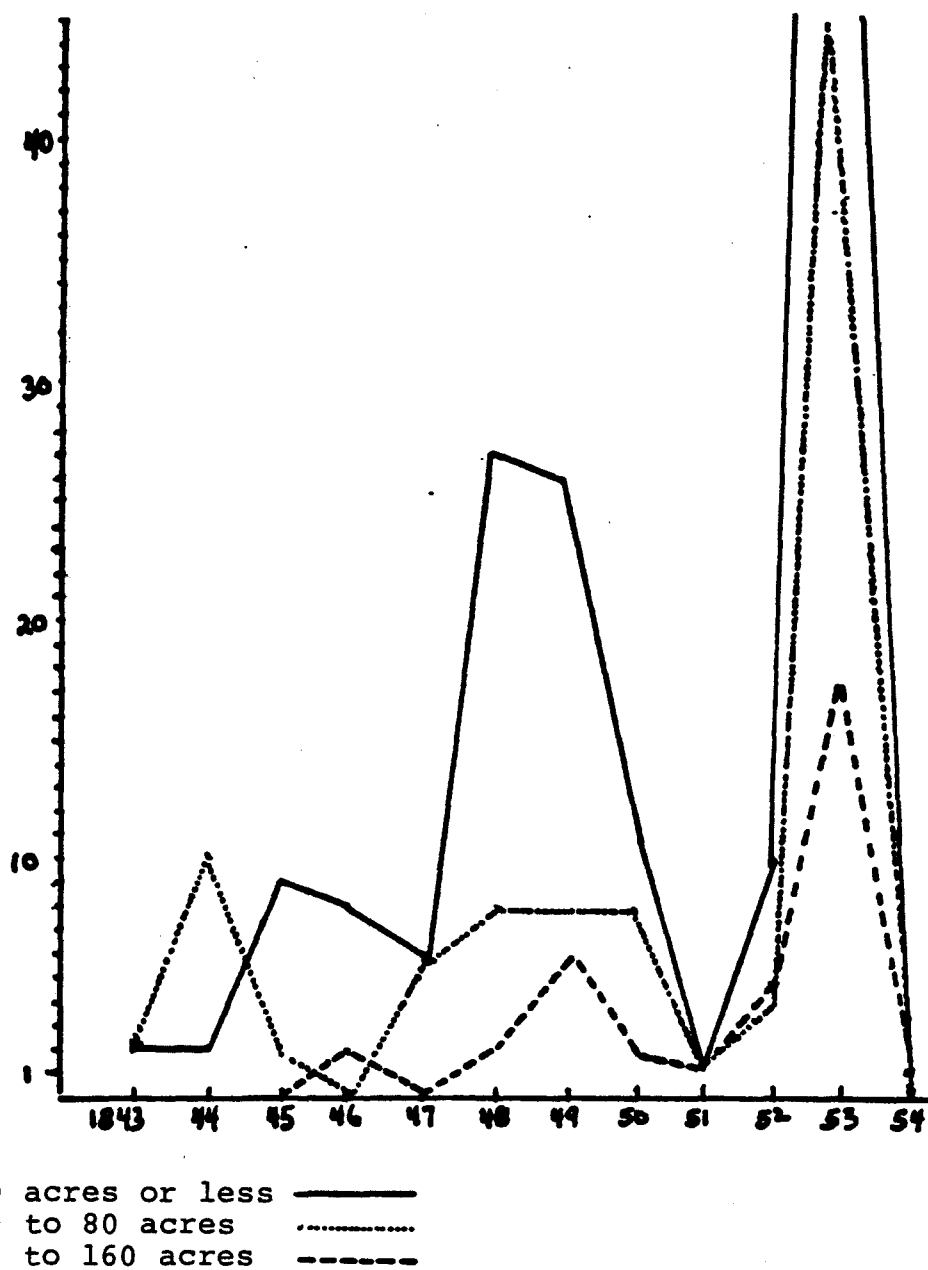


Figure 7. Size and Number of Individual Transactions.

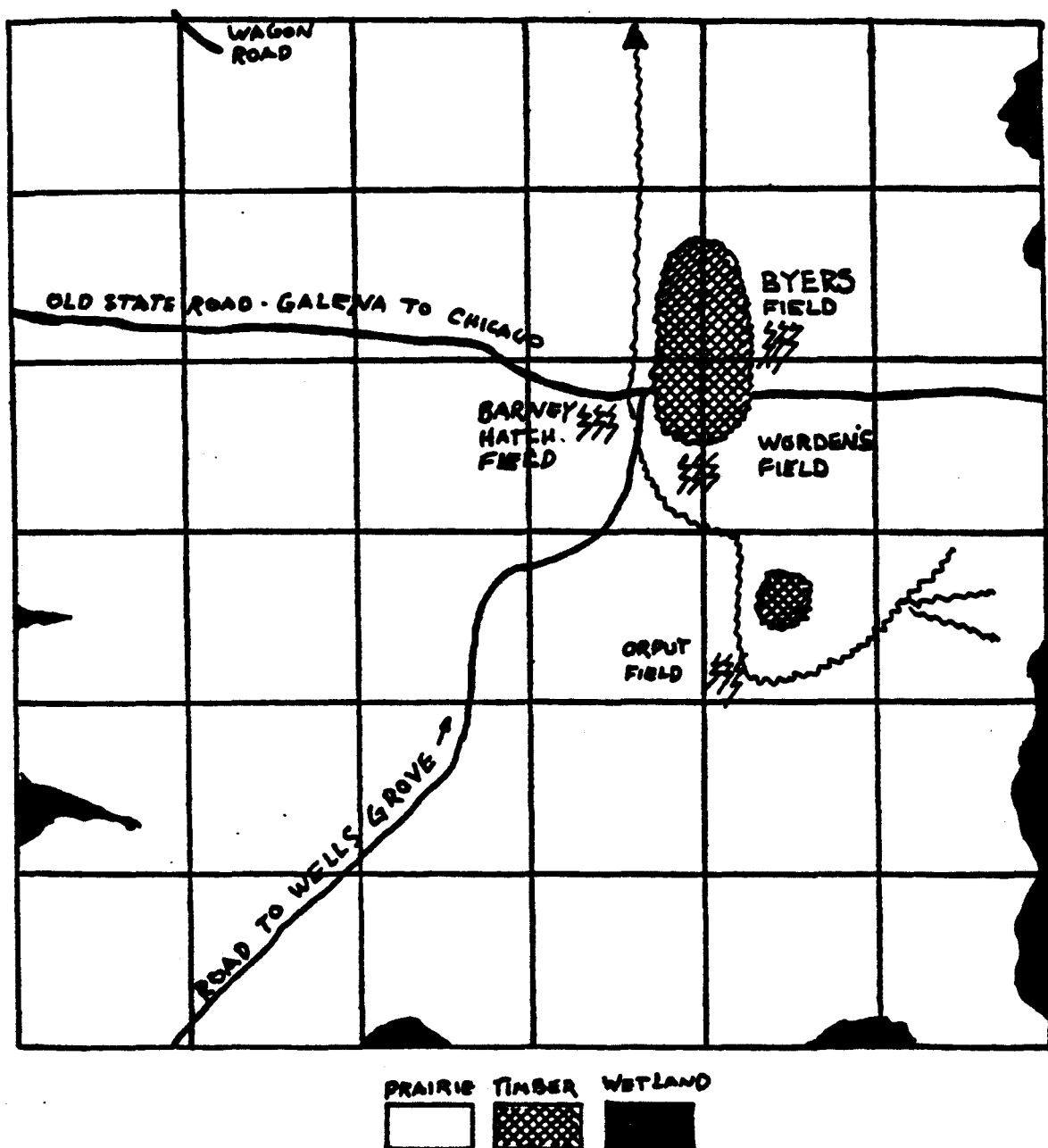


Figure 8. Copy of Original Survey Map of South Grove Township, De Kalb County, Illinois. Source, De Kalb County Courthouse.

played a role in the settlement of the township is apparent when the total land entered by name is compiled. A random check shows that at least ten persons bought one thousand to two thousand acres each. There were 372 single land entries in the township, with seventy-six individuals accounting for all of these entries. A check of the old county histories reveals that most of the large land buyers remained active in county affairs long after the land had been sold, including active participation in the Civil War. This would indicate that the role of non-resident eastern speculators was of little or no importance in this township. This is substantiated by the Public Domain Sales Land Tract Record Listing that shows that the pioneer farmer derived his land title from the federal land office and not from non-resident investors. The years 1843 to 1854, then, belong to local speculators large and small, who remained permanent settlers.³⁶

An attempt should be made to devise a model to predict which types of land were bought early and which land sold late. Applied to South Grove, this should clarify the relative importance of different factors. Two factors applicable to South Grove would be the distance from the principal highway and proximity to the wooded groves. Using Joseph Schafer as a guide, we would consider vegetation cover and soil as additional factors in the timing of public land sales.³⁷ A model of land sales based on such

assumption must also include the hypotheses, derived from Schafer, that prairies sold earlier than woodland, and land with good soil sold earlier than land with poor soil. We can discount other possible factors such as projected town sites, because there were none, or the capital-raising function of school land which would retard its sales to benefit from rising land values, because this section sold in the second year of land sales.

Of the four independent variables, only two correlated well with the dependent variable, the dates of acquisition. Only proximity to the highway and wooded groves appear to correlate with chronology. The prairie land sold later than the small woodlands, and soil quality is so evenly distributed that it had no effect.

The investigation of the land entry sequence in South Grove led to an analysis of the soil reports for De Kalb County, much of which was analyzed in the preceding chapter. The soil survey map (Figure 9), when compared with the original survey map (Figure 8), substantiates the correctness of the location of the groves. We can see that the majority of the land in South Grove is brown silt loam, "which has never been covered with forests."³⁸ The surveyor's original field notes (Figure 9) also reveal that timber was limited to sections ten, eleven, fourteen, and twenty-three. These timbered sections are also mentioned

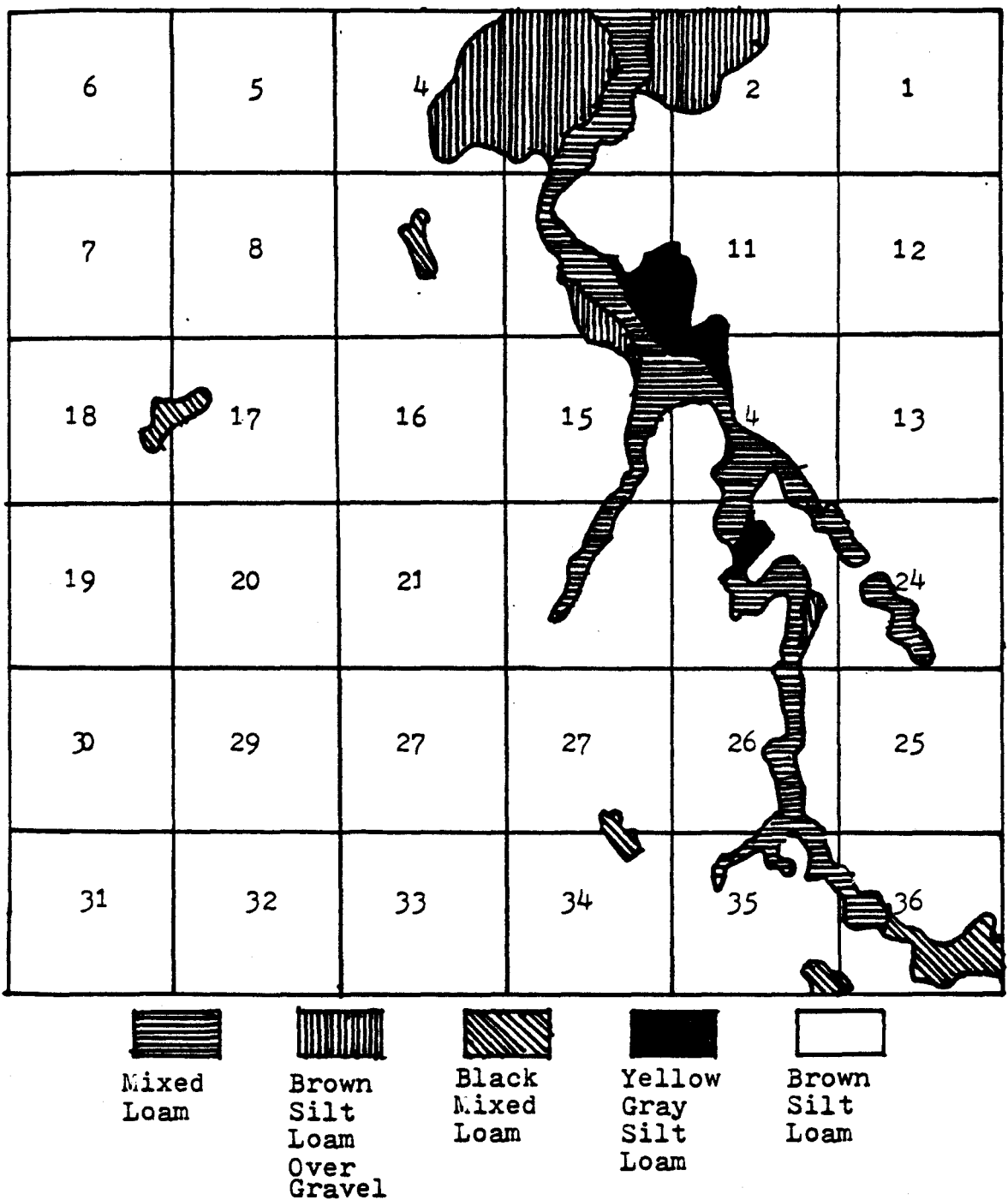


Figure 9. Soil Survey Map of South Grove Township, De Kalb County, Illinois. Source, De Kalb County Soils, Agricultural Experiment Station Soil Report 23 (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1922).

in an old history of the county and bear out the accuracy of the surveyor's map.³⁹

The influence of squatters on land entry is much more difficult to assess. Squatter settlement in Illinois was considerable, as is suggested by the fact that the state had sufficient population to form a territorial legislature in 1812 before any government land was offered for sale.⁴⁰ The presence of squatters in an area before land could legally be sold was a recurring issue throughout early Illinois history. The original survey map of South Grove (Figure 8) indicated the location of four cultivated fields belonging to squatters, and all grouped around the largest grove. The site selected by these squatters had several natural advantages over other locations in the township during these early days. Timber was readily available in the grove for the many uses of pioneer life. The squatters had clustered near a stream, which helped ease water requirements. The Old State Road, which ran from Chicago to Galena, was nearby. This provided an easy access to the outside world as well as a roadside market for travelers. The entry dates for these squatters are 1845-46 for Byers, 1845-47 for Hatch, 1849 for Worden, and 1845-46 for Orput. Figure 10 shows the entry dates and locations of the squatters.

These entry dates fall shortly after the initial surge of land sales in the 1840s. Since there was a claims

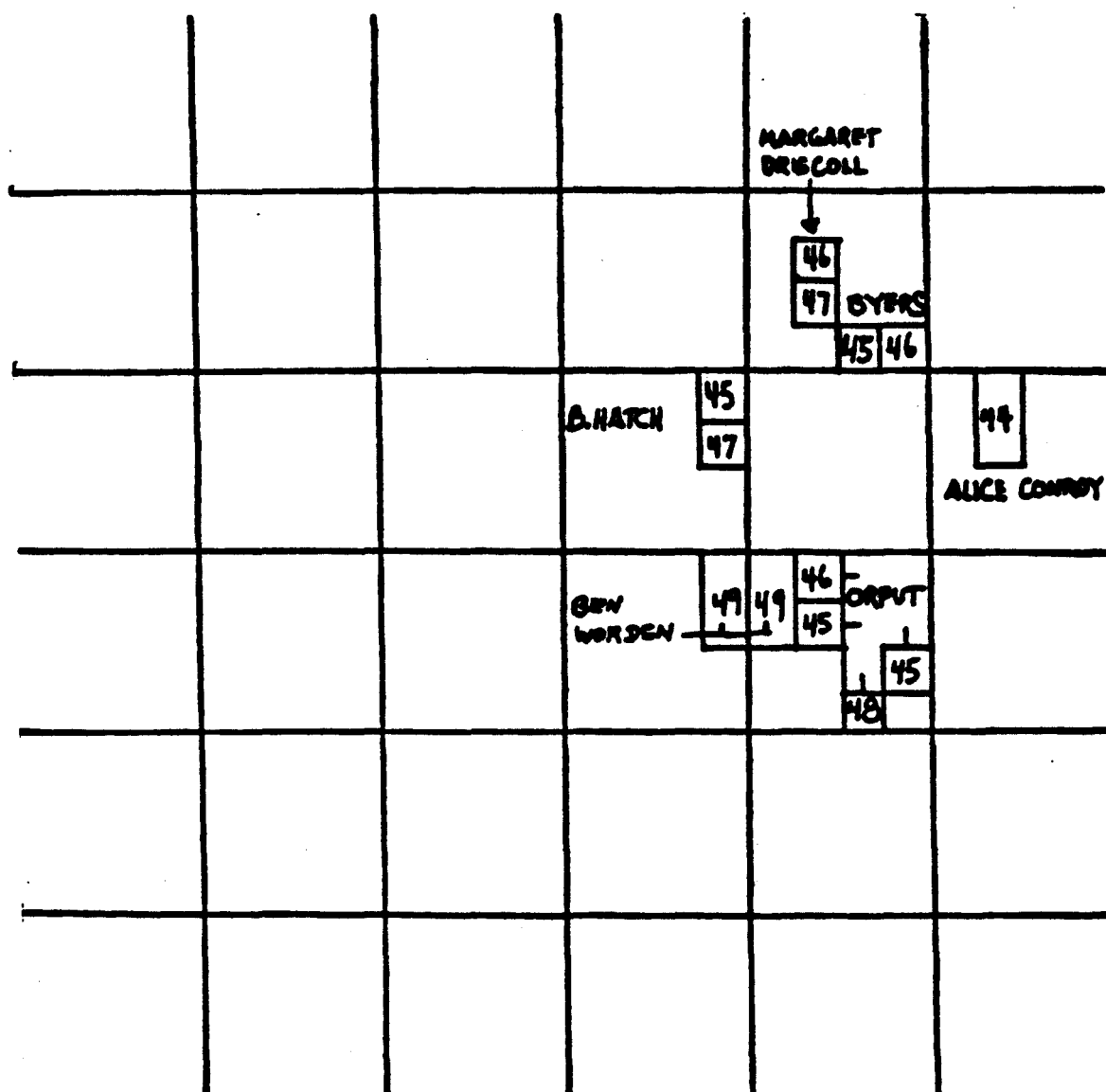


Figure 10. Entry Dates and Location of the Squatters in South Grove Township. Source, Public Domain Sites Land Tract Record Listing (Springfield: State Archive Division, 1982).

association established within the county, these late entries indicate that the squatters had little fear that their land would be sold to others.

William Driscoll is mentioned in old county histories as the first permanent settler in South Grove. He settled near a large wooded grove in 1836 but is not shown on the original surveyor's map as an agricultural squatter.

The Driscoll family does not live up to our definition of the stalwart, hard working pioneer, for the father, John, and his four sons were members of a well-organized gang that terrorized the Illinois frontier for years, which will be examined in a later chapter. The widow of William Driscoll, Margaret, remained to enter forty acres of land in 1846 and another forty acres in 1847, both in section eleven, near what was presumably the original home site. It is interesting to note that Margaret Driscoll and Alice Conroy, who entered her land in 1844, were the only female settlers listed as land purchasers.

The township of South Grove was opened for land sales by the Federal Government in 1843, and only one economic activity, the land business, dominated the entire period from the year until 1854. It would take a number of years to change that activity, and it would also take a transportation revolution to permit commercial agriculture to gain a firm foothold in the county.

FOOTNOTES

¹Arthur C. Boggess, The Settlement of Illinois 1778-1830 (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1908); W. V. Pooley, The Settlement of Illinois from 1830 to 1850, Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin (Historical Series, 1. Madison: n.p., 1908).

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⁵Thomas Clark, Frontier America (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 145.

⁶Robert E. Riegal, America Moves West (New York: Holt and Co., 1956), p. 192.

⁷Albert P. Brigham, Geographic Influences in American History. (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1936), p. 149; also, Ellen C. Semple, American History and Its Geographic Conditions (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903), pp. 76, 151.

⁸Arthur F. Bentley, Conditions of the Western Farmer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1893), p. 54.

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¹⁰James Hall, Statistics of the West (Cincinnati: J. A. James Co., 1837), p. 103.

¹¹Archer B. Hulbert, Soil, Its Influence on the History of the United States (New York: Russell and Russell, 1930), p. 70.

¹²Ibid., p. 72.

¹³Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁴Malcolm J. Rohrbough, The Land Office Business (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 187-190; also see Leslie Hewes, "The Northern Wet Prairie . . .," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 41 (December 1951), 307-323, especially 312-313.

¹⁵Terry G. Jordan, "Between the Forest and the Prairie," Agricultural History, vol. 38, no. 4, (October 1964), p. 206; also Joseph Schafer, Four Wisconsin Counties (Madison: 1927), p. 24.

¹⁶Hulbert, Soil, Its Influence, p. 23.

¹⁷John M. Peck and John Messinger, New Sectional Map of the State of Illinois compiled from the United States Surveys (New York: J. N. Colton and Co., 1839 and 1843).

¹⁸Lewis M. Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County (Chicago: Pioneer Publishing Co., 1907), p. 386.

¹⁹S. Augustus Mitchell, Illinois in 1837 (Philadelphia: Mitchell, 1837), p. 37.

²⁰Hall, Statistics of the West, p. 99.

²¹Wayne D. Rasmussen (ed.), Readings in the History of American Agriculture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), p. 78. John Deere invented the steel plow at Grand Detour, Illinois, just west of De Kalb County.

²²Theodore C. Pease, The Frontier State, 1818-1848 (Chicago: McClurg and Co., 1919), p. 164.

²³Frank E. Stevens, "Stillman's Defeat," Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society VII (1902), 170-179; also see, Milo Milton Quaife, Life of Black Hawk (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1926); Frank E. Stevens, The Black Hawk War (Chicago: Frank E. Stevens, 1903); Joseph I. Lambert, "The Black Hawk War, A Military Analysis," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society XXXII (December 1939), 442-473.

²⁴Chicago Democrat, 3 June 1835.

²⁵Roy N. Robbins, Our Landed Heritage (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1962), p. 68.

²⁶Henry Steel Commager, Documents of American History, vol. 1, doc. 153 (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

²⁷Pooley, Settlement of Illinois, pp. 572-575.

²⁸Ibid., p. 572.

²⁹Robert P. Howard, Illinois, A History of the Prairie State (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 162ff; Theodore L. Carlson, The Illinois Military Tract (Urbana: The University Of Illinois Press, 1951), p. 51; also Thomas Donaldson, comp. The Public Domain. Its History, with Statistics (Washington, 1884), p. 174.

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³⁵Allan G. Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairie in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 43.

³⁶For land speculation, see Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, p. 39; Theodore L. Carlson, The Illinois Military Tract, pp. 25, 27, 40; Malcolm J. Rohrbough, The Land Office Business (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 234; Roy M. Robbins, Our Landed Heritage, The Public Domain, 1776-1936 (University of Nebraska Press, 1962), pp. 62, 63, 66, 193-5.

³⁷Joseph Schafer, Four Wisconsin Counties (Madison: 1927), pp. 11, 14, 110.

³⁸"De Kalb County Soils," University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station Soil Report 23 (June 1922).

³⁹Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, p. 6.

⁴⁰Howard, Illinois, A History, p. 78.

CHAPTER IV

DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SOUTH GROVE TOWNSHIP

The term "manuscript census" used in this chapter refers to the original, signed records filed by the census enumerator containing information on each family and farm visited in South Grove Township, De Kalb County, Illinois, in 1850.

Historical demography at the county level has slight academic status, outside of a few advanced institutions. It has been carried forward chiefly through the interest of independent scholars, foundations, social science institutes, and governmental agencies. While there is much demand for population forecasts, there is little public clamor for historical demography. The inadequacy of the statistical data usually available for earlier periods is often discouraging and at best makes large demands on the patience, ingenuity, and restraint of the scholar engaged in such studies. A growing number of such scholars have made successful beginnings in the field.¹

In 1948 Barnes F. Lathrop called attention to the potential value of census materials as an historical source. In his paper, he referred to Joseph A. Hill, who in 1980 first advocated the use of census records by histo-

rians. Lathrop pointed out that a better understanding of a community would be derived by conducting analyses not attempted in printed reports of the Census Bureau, and that analyses covering several censuses promised the greater reward. He also warned, however, that "Census material . . . must be used with steady awareness of the imperfections of the data."²

South Grove Township was chosen for a population analysis because in an earlier chapter it was used for a study of land entry. The advantage of looking at a single township is the greater detail in which population and social patterns can be studied than would be possible from published census statistics at a county level. James C. Malin thought that the local-community approach makes possible the analysis of units small enough so that they can be dealt with in the entirety of their behavior.³ The only criticism of the township study might be that the data may not be representative of the whole county.

Several frontier historians have made significant use of census population schedules, and special reference should be made to the works of two notable scholars: Merle Curti and Allan G. Bogue. Merle Curti, in his book The Making of an American Community, employed original census data for a detailed study of one Wisconsin county.⁴ Bogue's more recent volume, From Prairie to Corn Belt, includes a number of township and county statistical stud-

ies on population characteristics, farm tenure, national origins, farm tenancy, and turnover of farm operators.⁵

Curti and Bogue both encountered questions that remain unanswered. Some of the questions raised by Curti dealt with the distinctions among population subgroups such as farm laborers versus farm owners, children versus farm laborers; the identity of occupational servants, the reliability of certain census figures, and need for further study of population flow. Bogue raised questions regarding farm tenure, tenancy, turnover, and persistence of farm families.

Curti and Bogue both admitted that they had covered only the preliminary stages of census interpretation and made no claim for perfection or absolute accuracy. Indeed, Bogue said, "Some of the material presented is preliminary in nature, and perhaps this book can best be described as an exploratory essay."⁶

The work of an early frontier historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, contained some propositions about the age and sex structure of the population. He did not work with specific county censuses but suggested that the frontier was composed to a large extent of young persons and that there were more men than women. In making these assertions, Turner was speculating that the frontier population was different from the national norm.⁷

We could speculate that, demographically speaking, if

there were an unbalanced ratio of male to female, the growth of families would be inhibited, which perhaps would retard the economic development of the township. In addition, we might expect to see a growth in the size of the average farm because of a smaller farmer-owner potential.

Opposed to Turner's view is that of Jack E. Eblen. In a more recent study of frontier populations, he attempts to prove that frontier populations were closer to the national norms than many historians since Turner have supposed.⁸ If this were true in South Grove Township, we might expect to see larger, well-established families and, perhaps, a more viable farming economy.

This question is examined to determine if there was a younger population and a preponderance of males to females, which would then demonstrate that the Turner thesis applies to South Grove Township.

For many reasons, it is worthwhile to analyze population structure at the township level. This would permit inferences regarding the proportion of the population available for working the farms and ability of the population to maintain itself or to expand into a more balanced society than usually expected for a frontier area, as proposed by Turner.

Although it is not possible to know everything about the settlers who entered South Grove Township, it is possible to understand some aspects of this pioneer township in

1850. The census takers who compiled the population records in that year have preserved for the historian data that will help to understand some of the social and economic aspects of life in a frontier community. The census worker listed the name, age, and state of birth of each member of a household, gave the occupation of the holder and of any sons of working age. In addition, the census taker gave the amount of land each farmer owned or operated. The 1850 census does not distinguish between owners, operators, or tenants. First to be considered in our study will be the birthplace of all adults in South Grove Township. The source for all data is the United States manuscript census, 1850.

Nativity

Table 2 lists the birth states of all heads of households, their wives, and other adults persons but does not include dependent children. As can be seen in the table, more adults were born in New York than any other state. This is followed in second place by Ohio, with the birth state of the rest in order.

For the birthplace of children of families living in the township, tabulated in Table 3, Illinois ranked first, with New York, Michigan, and Ohio following in order.

TABLE 2

BIRTHPLACE OF ALL FARM OWNERS
AND THE PARENTS OF FARM OWNERS

Birth State	Number of Persons
New York	31
Ohio	8
Connecticut	1
Michigan	1
New Hampshire	1
New Jersey	1
Rhode Island	1
Foreign Birth	
Ireland	6
Scotland	2

TABLE 3

BIRTHPLACE OF ALL CHILDREN LIVING AT HOME

Birth State	Number
Illinois	37
New York	25
Michigan	15
Ohio	8

The majority of South Grove settlers were born in the East, which gives support to the idea put forth in Chapter II regarding the settlement of northern Illinois, that the development of the Erie Canal-Great Lakes transportation route shifted the origin of migration from the South and Southeast to the East. The large number of children born in states other than Illinois and brought to De Kalb County would seem to lend credibility to the assertion that the new settlers in the county were substantial farmers. They had to be.

The manuscript censuses do not tell us directly of the way stations through which the American emigrant passed on the journey from the state of his birth to the Illinois prairies. His children's states of birth, however, do reveal some of them. Unfortunately, we cannot be sure just how much of the story the birthplaces of children provide in any one case. The fifty-two farmers in South Grove Township in 1850 had eighty-five children living at home. The birthplaces of these children indicated only three states other than Illinois. The South Grove settlers of 1850 brought at least forty-eight children with them. To a considerable extent, migration to the new township was a family movement; society on the agricultural frontier was a family society with all of the attending social values remaining intact.

It is difficult to compare South Grove Township nativity records with similar tabulations by Bogue or Curti for several reasons. Bogue's Bureau County was split from Putnam County in 1837, but Putnam was established in 1825 and is south of the Black Hawk territory, which places it in a different migration stream from De Kalb and other counties of northern Illinois. And both authors used tables based on householders only, without any separation of the birthplaces of parents and children. Bogue's nativity tabulation for Bureau County, Illinois, indicated birthplaces which included the entire eastern seaboard,

while Curti's tabulations for householder birthplace in Trempealeau County was for region only, and the "Yankee stock" of New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania account for a higher percentage than we find true for South Grove.

Ages

Historians speculate on whether frontier communities were composed of young families or more mature couples who had older children. There is not a uniform system of reporting such data. Comparisons across different studies would be easier if researchers agree on a uniform system. For example, Bogue's study shows average rather than specific ages,¹⁰ and Curti reports ages by decade. For his group of gainfully employed, Curti found the median age was 28.8 in 1850, but this probably included many children at home, and one must question their true employment status. Curti set his age divisions as follows: under twenty, twenty to twenty-nine, thirty to thirty-nine, and so forth, which permits easy reference to age groups.¹¹

Curti questioned the accuracy of reported ages, noting that a disproportionate number of persons gave age figures with the last digit a zero, which he suspected was an approximation.¹² This tendency was not seen in the data on South Grove Township as ages were not rounded out but were given in exact figures.

Age distribution for South Grove Township separates adults from the children at home and includes a breakdown according to sex. Table 4 includes all householders, their wives, relatives, and other individuals except unmarried children living at home.

TABLE 4
AGES OF ALL HOUSEHOLDERS IN 1850

Ages	Number
16 to 20	2
21 to 25	8
26 to 30	6
31 to 35	8
36 to 40	4
41 to 45	4
45 to 50	9
51 to 55	3
56 to 60	0
61 to 65	0
66 to 70	0
71 to 75	1

A study of the data for South Grove Township in Table 4 indicates that the majority of South Grove farmers were mature men and that the young settler who was twenty-five years of age or less with child-wife was in the minority. There were twenty-two males between twenty-six and forty-five, and nine who fell in the forty-five to fifty category. This is in agreement with Bogue, who concluded that:

Evidently the pioneer was a mature man and the young settler and his wife were rarities . . . the typical pioneer of the counties studied was apparently a married man between the ages of 25 and 45 who had started his family before he moved to the Illinois frontier.¹³

James C. Malin also interpreted his early findings to show that the frontier population was simply a cross-section of the population at large.¹⁴

Ages and Marriage

Bogue seems to imply that families whose children were born in other states were older than those whose children all were born in the new home state. The county he studied in Illinois counted 52 percent born in Illinois. The South Grove count, as seen in Table 5, was 47 percent born in Illinois. The largest number of children born outside of the state were children of parents in the forty-one to fifty age group, which allows us to agree with his conclusion that older parents had their families with them when they came to Illinois.

TABLE 5

AGES OF WOMEN ACCORDING TO BIRTHPLACE OF THEIR CHILDREN

Ages of Mother	Number Reporting	Born Outside Illinois	Born in Illinois
15 to 20	2	1	3
21 to 30	7	2	17
31 to 40	4	4	12
41 to 50	7	32	8
51 to 60	2	6	-0-

There were only nine mothers in the fifteen-to-thirty age bracket, whereas there were thirteen mothers older than thirty. Only three of the younger mothers had children who were born outside of Illinois, whereas twenty children were

born in Illinois. By contrast, more of the children of the older mothers were born in states other than Illinois. These figures support Bogue's assertion that there were fewer younger than older mothers and that younger mothers bore their children after they arrived in Illinois.

Male children slightly outnumbered females in 1850. The census showed eight more males than females, as shown in Table 6. Sex on the frontier had practical implications. Male children meant farm help for the fathers; female children would share the household labors.

TABLE 6

AGES OF CHILDREN RESIDING AT HOME IN 1850

Ages	Male	Female	Total
1-5	16	9	25
6-10	6	10	16
11-15	8	9	16
16-20	10	8	18
21-25	8	4	12
26 and over	-0-	-0-	-0-
Totals	48	40	88

Table 7 on the next page shows the size of families, defined as parents and number of children at home. The number of families with five or more children is 26 percent of all families counted, whereas families with three or less children account for 61 percent. Younger parents may have increased the size of their families over the years.

TABLE 7

SIZE OF FAMILY BY NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Number of Children	Families Reporting
-0-	2
1	3
2	4
3	5
4	3
5	-0-
6	3
7	-0-
8	1
9	1
10	-0-
11	1
12 and over	-0-

TABLE 8

AGE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE

Number of Years Husband Older Than Wife	Families Reporting
same age	4
1	1
2	3
3	-0-
4	2
5	3
6	2
7	1
8 to 12	-0-
13	1
14 to 15	-0-
16	1

Number of Years Wife Older
Than Husband

1	3
---	---

Personal Features of Family Structure

A search was made for other data which would give additional information about the pioneers' personal lives. The question of whether older men married younger women can be examined in Table 8 on the preceding page. The data reveal nothing exceptional in domestic age relationships. For this particular group, there seems to have been no general tendency for older men to marry much younger women, in agreement with Bogue. Eighty-three percent of the married couples were within six years of the same age, and four were exactly the same. Although most of the men were older than their wives, three did marry older females.

The township history records the role of women on the frontier of northern Illinois and is revealed as women listed as head of household in the 1850 census. There were only two women in this category. One was Betsey Barber, age 58, who had three children, ages fourteen, seventeen, and nineteen. The other was Margaret Driscoll, whose husband was the victim of the 1841 vigilante movement as recounted in the chapter on crime. After the execution of William, she remained in the township with her family. Before 1850, she entered a total of eighty acres. On the 1850 census she is shown as owning six hundred acres and had four children living at home. Their ages were eleven, fourteen, sixteen, and eighteen.

The occupational breakdown of the 1850 census caused

the enumerator little effort as there were no urban centers in the township. Out of eighty males listed, seventy-eight were farmers; the other two were carpenters.

Curti expresses some doubts concerning the true status of farm laborers in earlier censuses. It is difficult to account for absence in the 1850 census of a category for farm laborers in South Grove Township since we know that there were many older male members of the family who worked on the family farm. In Curti's study, the 1880 census shows that 67 percent of all farm laborers were relatives of the householder.¹⁵ In South Grove we can assume that males not listed as farm owners in 1850 were farm laborers. Bogue apparently made this assumption because in his 1850 study he counted those fifteen years of age and older as laborers.¹⁶ Thus, the South Grove study does little to improve our understanding of the role of farm laborers. Sons of the early farmers very likely assumed responsibility for regular farm duties, and many were doing men's work, yet many of the younger males must have attended school part of the time and could not have been full-time laborers in the strictest sense.

This population study of South Grove Township illustrates how census data can be used to understand part of the economic, social, and cultural context of the early community. Studies of population can add to our understanding of local history, but the data must be supported

by other perspectives as well. It is evident that, if county settlement studies are to continue, population data must receive the attention of competent historians as a source for historical inferences rather than seen as mere quantitative facts. Much of the data of South Grove Township are self-sufficient; yet correct interpretation of them will enable us to understand qualities of family life on the frontier in northern Illinois. The census pages do indeed offer us a living drama of the past.

FOOTNOTES

¹The use of mathematic and statistical methods in an effort to understand or reconstruct American History is controversial. See prologue of Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Enterman, Time on the Cross (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974).

²Barnes F. Lathrop, "History From the Census Returns," Southwestern Historical Quarterly 51 (1948), 293, 304.

³James C. Malin, "Local Historical Studies and Population Problems" 300, in Caroline F. Ware, ed. The Cultural Approach to History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940); also James C. Malin, The Grassland of North America Prolegomena To Its History (James C. Malin: Lawrence, Kansas, 1947), p. 280.

⁴Merle Curti, The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier Community (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

⁵Allan G. Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), Preface.

⁶Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, p. 3.

⁷Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York: Macmillan, 1920), pp. 1-38.

⁸Jack E. Eblen, "An Analysis of Nineteenth Century Frontier Populations." In Demography 2 (1965), 399-413.

⁹Allan G. Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, p. 23; Merle Curti, The Making of an American Community, p. 64.

¹⁰Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, p. 23.

¹¹Ibid., p. 56.

¹²Curti, The Making of an American Community, p. 457.

¹³Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, pp. 22, 24.

¹⁴Malin, The Grassland of North America, p. 289.

¹⁵Curti, The Making of an American Community, pp. 145-46.

¹⁶Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt, pp. 185-86.

CHAPTER V

FARM MAKING IN DE KALB COUNTY

The researcher finds that some of the most important sources are documents of any nature written during the period of which he intends writing. And when he encounters materials written by the very people about whom he intends to write, it is a windfall. This chapter is the result of a study of personal letters, journals, newspapers, travel accounts, and old histories. Travel accounts are important in giving a picture of Illinois by early visitors to the area who describe the prairie in its natural state, a description often beyond the scope of the letter writer, the diarist, or even the newspaper. Some of the best available material on early farm life consists of the reminiscences of participants, written years later or preserved from interviews by authors and compilers of country and local histories. These accounts of earlier days constitute an invaluable storehouse of materials. But these must be used with caution, for often the past is overridealized as the "good old days," glossing over the raw edges in a description of its primitiveness and its ignorance, which often translates into vital forces for the building of characters and morals. Each generation,

it seems, worked harder than its successor.

The attempt will be made in this chapter to present the early De Kalb County settler in the act of reestablishing himself as a farmer and as custodian of social values brought to the new frontier. This will be done, as much as possible, by using the settlers' written thoughts and the observations of others contemporary to them. Underlying this are local county histories that, through empirical scrutiny, have been found to be acceptably accurate.¹ All of this will be placed in the larger context of descriptions of early northern Illinois by travelers and others, keeping them geographically as close to De Kalb County as possible.

Clarence Danhof had shown that, in general, one thousand dollars was a minimum cash requirement for establishing a prairie farm under conditions of the 1850s, which does not include moving expenses to the new land.² It seems safe to say, then, that the pioneers who traveled from the eastern part of the country to the prairies of northern Illinois were at least prosperous enough to scrape together the minimum amount of money needed to travel to the state, settle down, and start farming. One cannot stereotype the settlers on any frontier in America, but, in a relative sense, the small degree of prosperity made these farmers different from those who had settled earlier in the southern counties of the state.

As the earliest settlers came into De Kalb County, they were confronted with two sets of problems: the one concerned with shelter, food, health, and things vital to the protection of the family; the other with transportation, currency, the marketplace--all things necessary for economic advancement.

The newcomer to De Kalb County, whether squatter or recent purchaser of government land, was likely to find his new home some distance from a settlement or from friends and neighbors. Loneliness and discomfort were part of the frontier experience. If the move to the isolated new farm site was a short one, the settler would spend time building a cabin, cutting and clearing, perhaps planting a little corn, then, for safety, returning to the old home for the winter, to come again with the family in the spring. Henry Boies writes that a "large number of new settlers moved back to more comfortable residence on the Fox River, to Joliet, or whatever place might have been their former homes."³

Many had come from distant places and had to spend the winter in the county. If these settlers arrived early in the season, they would plow a few acres and plant Indian corn on it. Since housing was of primary importance, construction would begin on some sort of shelter, and the rest of the summer could be spent in breaking the prairie. Cutting grass hay for the winter provender of

the stock was essential.⁴ The facility with which the hay gathering could be done depended upon the equipment possessed and the experience and ability of the settler and his family.

William Sebree seems to have been the first settler who became a permanent resident of De Kalb County. He was originally a Virginian who settled in Bloomington, Illinois, before moving to De Kalb. The family placed the wagon box on the ground and lived in it until a log house twelve by fourteen feet could be built. This cabin had no fireplace, and for a time the only fire was built on the ground. There were no window frames, and the only opening was one log cut out on one side, which was covered by a blanket to keep out the cold. By killing deer and other game, trapping prairie chickens and quail, and using provisions brought along, they subsisted until spring.⁵ Later in the year, he built a double log cabin, which remained the home of a numerous family and the stopping place for travelers for nearly twenty years. His son recorded early memories in a handwritten letter dated 1895:

We (sic) being the first white settler in De Kalb County came here in 1834 and at that time there was over three-hundred Indians in this county and my mother and another boy lived three weeks on nothing but corn pounded in a stump with an iron wedge. The people of today know nothing of the hardships of the first settlers of this county.⁶

Another visitor passing through northern Illinois in 1838 described another cabin:

All the light came down the wide chimney or through the open door. There was an iron skillet, a small black kettle and a tea pot. At the back was a bed covered with a bit of cotton cloth. The door was open and the raw wind swept in gusts through the miserable place filling it with ashes and smoke.

Such primitive cabins may or may not have been typical. Again we turn to Henry Boies:

Some commence at once to build a good solid substantial dwelling of logs, notched at the ends and laid up thoroughly and durable; finished with a roof of shakes or split staves, and made convenient with a window and door. But to many of the newcomers, hurried with the imperative necessity of breaking the land and planting a crop for future sustenance, this was thought to involve too much labor. Such houses were a little extravagant. Many of the homes in which settlers, now wealthy, spent the first months of their residence were in a shelter built entirely of shakers (sic) and saplings. In this dwelling, a person could stand erect in the middle but not at the sides. It furnished little more space than was necessary for the bed and family valuables; the cooking was done out of doors.⁸

In the early rush to build a shelter, little time or labor was spent on outbuildings. For the cow and horse or the few head of stock, a lean-to structure of poles and grass provided shelter, but as fields expanded, crops grew, and stock multiplied, these early round log shelters were replaced by stables and barns of rough or hewn logs. Hay barns, corncribs, smokehouses, enlarging the cabin or building new ones necessitated further carpentry for the settler.

Lumber was not easy to obtain in northern Illinois

counties. From Lamoille, Bureau County, Illinois, an early settler wrote to a relative that:

People do not build here as they would if they could get lumber as you can. They build here mostly of brick. A brick house will not cost as much as a wooden one, there is some talk of building brick barns. The water for the most part is too high or too low for sawing as the dam is not half made. Cyrus, our neighbor, built a cabin (of wood) which is a very costly building here. Carpenters cost high as well as the lumber. They charge two dollars a day, but I think the price will come down.⁹

The cost of labor did come down. The same writer reported in September 1840 that "son John built a brick house and paid the builder one dollar and seventy-five cents per day."

There were good reasons to build a cabin early, for winter on the Illinois prairie could be cold, as one settler from De Kalb County wrote:

In the first part of January, 1835, it turned terribly cold; the thermometer for a week almost showing every morning from twenty to thirty degrees below zero. The snow for weeks a foot or more deep. Having no cellar to speak of, the bread froze overnight, and had to be thawed out by roasting at the fireplace. Crowding around the chimney was the only way to keep warm.¹⁰

Another settler living a few miles away on the Fox River wrote in a letter to his homeland:

The country here is beautiful to look upon, but the long winter and the piercing cold such as I have never in my life experienced, together with the equally strong heat cause me to advise that no person who has a good income in Norway to leave it.¹¹

Such weather was hard not only on the farmer but on their stock as well. We read that:

The winter of 1841 was most severe. Suitable provisions had not been made for the stock and hundreds of horses, hogs, and cattle died of starvation. Most of the young stock was allowed to run out during the winter to secure their food or dried grass. This was a severe lesson.¹²

Another settler living in adjacent Kane County writes: "We have suffered this winter such intense cold in our log hut that I must raise every exertion to build a better house for my family and cattle . . . we lost a daughter this winter due to the cold."¹³ The next winter proved to be no better. "The winter is colder here than usual. There has been snow on the ground about four weeks with four inches and it snows again."¹⁴

Traveling in the open prairie in winter could be a dangerous experience:

I never came so near perishing as I did in the winter of 1843 on a night ride from Princeton to Dad Joes' (Jo Daviess County, twenty miles south on the Galena Road). The piercing wind swept over the bleak unsettled prairies, and a certain sense of danger crept over us that the driver might lose the track. It was an unbroken prairie desolate beyond description in the winter.¹⁵

One last letter may suffice in this description of northern Illinois weather:

The last winter was one of uncommon severity for this county and in a new county like this with so many coming in and many of them in a destitute situation and many cannot get comfortable situations for so severe a winter. I am told there is much sickness among the new settlers.¹⁶

Aside from these personal remarks written by the pioneers, the only other description regarding weather is

found in Henry Boies's history. He writes about "the regular course of these wet seasons which have been noted as coming every seventh year." And he adds that a drought occurred in 1859 and tornadoes in 1853 and 1860 which took a heavy toll of property and a few lives.¹⁷ Health was a crucial factor in the early days. The limited knowledge of diseases and their causes and the scarcity of doctors in the area caused many emigrants to seek such information as was available about the conditions of health, for Illinois enjoyed a particularly bad reputation in these regards. "This state is not so healthy as it was cracked up to be, there is a great deal of feaver (sic) and ague."¹⁸

In all of the early literature used in this history of De Kalb County, no disease is mentioned more frequently than fever and ague. So certain was the incidence that the early settler came to consider it a concomitant of the frontier. "He ain't sick, he's only got the ague," was the usual view. Today we know this disease as malaria. Its cause, at least up to the end of the nineteenth century, was unknown. Daniel Drake, in his study of the diseases of the period, listed the following names for it: "Autumnal bilious, intermittent, remittent, congestive, miasmatic, marsh, malignant, chill-fever, ague, fever and ague, dumb ague, and, lastly, THE fever."¹⁹ One veteran sufferer described it:

You feel as though you had gone through some sort of collision, thrashing-machine, or jarring-machine, and come out not killed, but next thing to it. You felt weak, as though you had run too far. You felt languid, stupid and sore, and down in the mouth and heel and partially raveled out. Your back was out of fix and your head ached and your appetite crazy. Your eyes had too much white in them, and your whole body and soul were entirely woe-begone, disconsolated, sad, poor, and good for nothing. You didn't quite make up your mind to commit suicide, but sometimes wished some accident would happen to knock either the malady or yourself out of existence. About that time you concluded you would not accept the whole state as a gift; and if you had the strength and means, you picked up Hanna and the baby and your traps and went back 'yander' to 'old Virginny,' the 'Jerseys,' Maryland or Pennsylvania.²⁰

The early settler and the traveler all knew that wherever stagnant water was to be found, the ague would be encountered. Low ground near rivers and creeks gave out "putrid exhalations."²¹ Edmund T. Flagg was equally positive. He wrote that:

A soil of such astonishing depth and fertility, yielded from the putrifying influences of the sun by the rank luxuriance of its vegetation, in the stifling sultriness of midsummer sends forth vast quantities of mephitic vapor fatal to life: while the decay of the enormous vegetables poisons the atmosphere with putrid exhalations.²²

One old settler thought fever and ague were caused by that "mysterious emanation of swamps and decaying vegetable matter." Another referred to that "malareous of estivoautumnal disease." There was a widespread belief among doctors that malaria attacked only adults; the "bad feelings" of children went unnoticed.

Very few suspected that the mosquito was the evil

agent, although this pest was present in huge numbers. In addition, unwashed bodies meant, of course, lice, and an unclean house attracted the house fly. William Oliver found these pests in his visits to Illinois. "The house is no soon entered than you hear one continuous hum, and the room is almost darkened by the flying insect."²⁴ Certainly there were many settlers to whom none of these characteristics could have been applied. Nevertheless, one cannot read the literature of the times without concluding that at least the generalizations were sound.

References to the fever and ague in De Kalb County cannot be found in the historical literature. But the geography was the same in the county as in other parts of northern Illinois, and we can conclude that living conditions and disease matched those areas where we can produce authoritative sources. As an example, Pickard and Buley write that disease caused a suspension of work on the Illinois and Michigan Canal, "that the people were much too sick to harvest crops, and that there was nothing that looked like life, even in the populous towns . . . and in 1839, the whole west was sick."²⁵

In the northern Illinois counties, fever and ague were present, but, in addition, in 1834 "cholera epidemics caused widespread suffering; and in 1849 fifty-two people gave up their lives from the effects of Erysipelas and scarlet fever." The same authors describe the quality

test necessary to make a good settler; he must "first have withstood the ravages of malarial fever and the tantalization of the prairie itch." If he could withstand these he was fit to help build the country. In adjacent Kane County, "intermittent and remittent bilious fever sorely afflicted the pioneers and probably shortened the lives of many." In 1847 "intermittent fever gave way to typhoid fever which carried off quite a number of people." After this "diphtheria and cerebro-spinal diseases displaced it to a marked extent." In 1849 the settlers in Kane County were in a state of panic when Asiatic Cholera appeared. "It affected all the river towns until 1854, and carried off from three hundred to three hundred fifty victims. Among the earliest settlers in nearby Lee County, "sickness was a serious handicap and often ended in tragedy. . . as there was so much undrained land."²⁶

The chief source of information regarding malaria in the upper Mississippi Valley in the first half of the nineteenth century is Daniel Drake's Systematic Treatise, referred to earlier. He concluded his chapter on autumnal fever by stating that malaria was the most important disease of the Mississippi Valley in his time. "Malaria is almost in every part of the Valley, and is an annual Pandemic-epidemic . . . it is, moreover, the great cause of mortality."²⁷ The trait which most strikingly demonstrated to Drake the malariousness of the country was the sickly

external appearance of the western settler:

The inhabitants seem indolent, yawning as if under the influence of fever and ague, which in fact, they often have. Over most of the interior Valley a ruddy complexion is rare and often replaced by a slight turbid hue or tinge of sallowness.

Drake visited, it seems, every community in the Middle West, describing it with attention to those aspects of the environment bearing on health. His accounts are uniformly sprinkled with such statements as, "all the forms of autumnal fever are at this place," and "autumnal fever prevails annually," and "in and around town, intermittents and remittents prevail every year." Years later, after long and varied observations on health, Drake concluded that:

As a general fact, the people of the Valley eat too much. I cannot attempt to enumerate on the vicious modes of cooking. As to personal habits, alcoholic liquor, though not so widespread as formerly, was still excessive and smoking prevails to a great extent.

The same authority wrote how adversely alcohol affected the stomach, liver, caused swelling of the feet, sore eyes, epileptic convulsions, and even leprosy. Worse that this:

There was always the chance of spontaneous combustion, to which intemperance predisposed the body. On this point facts have multiplied, until the most incredulous inquirer can scarcely retain his doubts. The bodies of corpulent inebriates, when asleep, have, in several instances, taken fire, by the accidental contact of a burning coal or candle and all the soft parts have been reduced to ashes.²⁸

Still, the healthiness of Illinois and its prairies had defenders. The Illinois Magazine pronounced the entire state a healthy one.²⁹

Because of the association of wet soil with the fever-producing miasma, the wet prairies were considered to be the least healthy portion of the prairies.³⁰ In contrast, the upland or dry prairies were considered to be "invariably free from the intermittent fever, an exception, which to emigrants must be of the utmost importance."³¹

Wherever the settler lived, on the upland prairie or wet prairie, near groves of trees or a timberless section, thoughts about health and death were ever present. One settler wrote:

I think those who die of consumption often die at the age of twenty-three. My niece Laura died at age twenty-three of the same complaint. Our minister said that who is there that does not have an uneasy feeling about death from morning till night.³²

Of course, good health would prolong life. In this vein, one of the original settlers describes how the local people attempted to retain good health:

People here make use of Sarsaparilla. A lady friend lived three years with a scrofulous complaint. She used Sarsaparilla and was cured. You use half the Sarsaparilla root, two or three liquorice, cover with water and boil about an hour, drain off the water and wash roots, then add more water. Take three spoonfuls three times daily.

The letter writer, Sarah S. Bryant, offers her opinion about the local medical profession:

Physician charges are enormous. I am told that if a Doctor is called to a house and several of the family are sick, he will charge each patient as if on a separate visit. We do our own doctoring. A new method is called Homeopathic method. My son got books on medicine and prescribes for neighbors and has very good cures.³³

Months later, Sarah S. Bryant reports on another cure:

Another woman had Catarrh and is confined to bed. She gets relief by using Peneroyal and Sage steeped in spirits. She wets her head with it and sniffed it up her nose frequently. Another neighbor used to be feeble and had night sweats and coughs. Now he eats no meat, butter, nor any greasy drinks or tea or coffee. He lives on bread, fruit, milk and eats sweet apples baked with milk, molasses and sugar. Another family takes a wet cloth and rub themselves over every morning quick and then a course dry cloth to rub themselves dry. This method keeps them from taking cold. They do not sleep on feathers. I entreat you not to sleep on feather beds. Try some or all of them to enjoy good health.³⁴

The early pioneer did not readily adjust to prairie life because he was unfamiliar with it. He thought in terms of trees, not prairies, for timber provided buildings, fuel, and fences. The farm seekers also selected their soil on the basis of the kind of forest growth that covered them. It was assumed on the basis of the product that land which grew only grass was not valuable.³⁵

There was disagreement even among experts regarding the quality of life on the prairie. From his travels about interior America during the years 1809-1811, naturalist John Bradbury evaluated the Illinois country as follows:

From the agricultural point of view, the vast tract of prairie extending through this region is an important

object of consideration. Amongst intelligent Americans, the question of whether it can or cannot be peopled by civilized man has been agitated. Accustomed as they are to timber for building, fuel and fences, they are not aware of the small quantity of that material that may be dispensed with; nor can they conceive that fences and even buildings may be constructed with a small portion of timber. Under these impressions, the belief in America is that the prairie cannot be inhabited by white men; even Mr. Brackenridge says it cannot be cultivated.³⁶ My own opinion is that it can be cultivated; and in time will be one of the most beautiful countries in the world.³⁷

As the pioneer continued to move into northern Illinois, words of advice poured forth to guide the prairie homeseeker. J. M. Peck gave his version of what to expect on the prairies of northern Illinois.

If the emigrant arrives in the dry season of autumn, he will be likely to select a level spot of prairie with a deep black soil determined to have rich land at any price, and perhaps in the spring find himself ploughing in mud and water . . . prairie land requires a strong team and a large plough kept sharp to break it up thoroughly. This must be done well, and every particle of the earth turned over or it had better be left alone.³⁸

The initial reaction of many observers to the Illinois prairie often was stated in aesthetic rather than practical terms. Christina Tillson, after viewing the seemingly infinite space of the prairie, wrote:

Suddenly the glories of the prairie burst upon our enraptured gaze, with its extended landscape, its verdure, its flowers, its picturesque groves, and all its exquisite variety of mellow shade and sunny light.³⁹

The prairies were often compared to the sea or ocean. The vastness and waving grass caused such comments as the following:

The prairies strikingly resemble the solitary grandeur of the ocean. There is something, too, of a sternly striking character in the land-scape of Illinois. The middle of these vast sweeping plains, owing to their being destitute of trees, are indescribably silent and lonesome.⁴⁰

Another analogy was to English parks:

We rode slowly over the prairie and viewed several beautiful sites; indeed we all agreed that Duke Hamilton Park was not all degraded by being compared with it.⁴¹

Even some of the settlers, despite the hardships encountered, found time to enjoy and to describe the beauty of Illinois:

The nights were in winter at once inexpressibly cold, and poetically fine. The sky is almost invariably clear, and the stars shine with a brilliance entirely unknown in England. Cold as it was, often did I stand at the door of our cabin, admiring their luster, and listening to the wolves, whose howling around the leafless woods at this season are almost unceasing.⁴²

Another view comes from an old settler looking at the land with a more practical eye:

If I live through this summer I don't think but what I can go through anything. But as to the country I like it first rate. I think there is no country in the world that is equal to this for farming. It does not look as dismal as it did when I first came over. The grass and grain is up and looks green and handsome as anything can, and the land does not lay as I supposed on a perfect level but lays in swells. If they only had the woods and water it would be a perfect garden of Eden.⁴³

An original settler in De Kalb County, looking toward the south in 1837, describes what he saw: "We see an immense almost treeless undulating prairie dotted by scattered cabins, the view bounded by Shabbona Grove."

But to the north we find that "between Sycamore and Genoa the country was well settled; northward from Genoa it was a broad wild prairie with no houses until near Marengo. Beyond that it was mostly an open country until we reached the east end of Lake Geneva."⁴⁴

As soon as he could, the early farmer prepared for his first crop. Into a small patch of ground near the cabin went some pumpkin seeds, potatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, and other common vegetables. In a Norwegian settlement on the Fox River near De Kalb County, one new pioneer told how he started:

I planted one barrel of wheat and in the spring of 1836 we planted about half a bushel of Indian corn and three bushels of potatoes. The next fall, we harvested fifteen bushels of wheat, six bushels of Indian corn, and fourteen bushels of potatoes. Wheat which is grown almost everywhere, is used for one's daily food. It costs from three to four dollars a barrel; corn costs from one and a half to two dollars a barrel, being not used for humans but for the cattle and horses.⁴⁵

Breaking the De Kalb prairie was a stubborn task, equally hard on man and beast. Plows were far from satisfactory, and the early examples were heavy affairs made of wood and wrought iron. The moldboard was of wood fitted to the iron, and the point was of steel, which had to be frequently sharpened by the local blacksmith at some considerable cost.⁴⁶ A crude harrow consisted of a tree fork with proper angle of trunk for a tongue and branch stubs for teeth. This served as a clod breaker until a harrow

of hewed oak could be constructed.

Breaking the prairie meant cutting through prairie grass with roots as large as a man's finger and extending twelve to fifteen inches under ground. This formed a heavy tough sod which had to be cut through on the bottom of the furrow as well as turned over. Plowing was delayed until the grass was quite green; otherwise it would turn and spring up again.⁴⁷

Sod plows were broader and more shallow than ordinary breaking plows, with the beam framed on an axle with wheels, one of which ran in their furrow and the other on the uncut surface. A furrow was cut about eighteen inches wide and three inches deep. Since at that depth the plow cut through the toughest part of the sod, it required from five to ten yoke of oxen to pull it.⁴⁸ This plow was supposed to require little guiding or holding, but as a matter of fact it was often out of the ground as much as in. Since the slice of sod was not completely inverted, the result was that prairie grasses frequently sprouted up again. Nor did the problem end with the first breaking; once the grass roots and fibers were rotted, the nonarable soil stuck like snow to a shovel, and the implement had to be removed and cleaned every few rods.⁴⁹

The utter failure of the old plow with wooden moldboard and steel share to meet the requirements of prairie soil and the unsatisfactory work of the ordinary cast iron

plow resulted in the development of the steel plow in 1837 by John Deere, pioneer blacksmith of Grand Detour, Illinois, just south of De Kalb County.⁵⁰ This plow, made of a mill saw blade, was light, self-scouring, and turned over the sticky black soil in good shape and kept on turning it over. Being at first a hand-made affair, it was expensive and scarce. It was a number of years before this type of plow was available in quantities and the prairie finally conquered.

In the new land of De Kalb County proper preparation of the soil for crops was not only difficult, but its importance was little appreciated in fields under cultivation. Plowing was shallow and pulverizing incomplete. The bull plow simply broke the ground land and edged it up, and the shovel plow did little better. As one observer stated, "the fields are rudely tilled, yet an abundant harvest could be obtained from soil laden with the accumulated humus of the ages."⁵¹

Cultivation was often neglected, and weeds and burrs grew as tall as the corn. Corn would grow very well in new ground, but if wheat were attempted before several years of corn, rye, and buckwheat, the product could be worthless.⁵² On prairie land, since a year or more was required for the turf to rot, a corn crop was usually planted the first year. A kernel was dropped in holes made with an ax or in the landside edge of every third

furrow so the plant could grow through the cracks. A yield of thirty bushels per acre was possible without cultivation. The second year the land was cross-plowed, and a yield of thirty bushels could be expected; or oats, rye, or spring wheat might be put in as a sod crop and some kind of a yield obtained, unless the season proved too dry. A more methodical start might be made by plowing the sod in the spring and letting it lie for a year by which time, if the plowing was well done, the green grass would be rotted and a regular plowing possible.⁵³

Corn planted in this fashion and cultivated would produce fifty to sixty bushels per acre. By the 1840s some of the rich prairie lands were producing one hundred to 120 bushels to the acre, with many of the stalks twelve to fifteen feet in height.⁵⁴

In De Kalb County slight attention was paid to seed selection, and little was understood about soil composition and the value of fertilizers. Squaw corn was the type commonly grown in the early period, but improved types such as Hackberry and Gourd seed were soon offering more rows to the ear and more quarts of whiskey to the bushel.⁵⁵ In the mid-1830s other new types were being introduced, including a white dented corn with twelve to twenty rows to the cob. Its advocates claimed as high as 120 bushels to the acre and up to eight ears to the stalk.⁵⁶

Besides corn, which was food and bread for man as well as provender for animals, wheat, rye, oats, and some hay and coarser grasses were widely raised. Wheat sown broadcast style on cleared ground and harrowed in with a brush harrow would produce some kind of a crop, provided the ground was not too new. Some farmers sowed as much as two bushels of wheat to the acre on new sandy soil and got an inferior harvest.⁵⁷ In the early days grain was ordinarily sown by hand or by a cast seeder. By 1855 corn was planted by a machine as described in a letter written by one of the original settlers;

They plant corn here on the dog trot. Well, I can drop corn on the run. They have machines here that will plant two rows to a time and you can go as fast as you can walk it and drop it one man can plant with it here as fast as six men can plant here now.⁵⁸

Many farmers could not afford the latest in farm tools and continued to sow the grain "by hand, and plant corn by hand and hoe." An indication of the average inventory of farm tools is found in the following:

I had a stubble plow, harrow, breaking plow, single shovel plow for corn, two hoes, two forks, two rakes, a scythe, a cradle, and a spade.⁵⁹

Some wheat was produced in all settled regions of Illinois, but in the 1830s the wheat crop was centered in an area about three counties wide, running from the mouth of the Illinois River through De Kalb County in the north.⁶⁰ Wheat remained the primary crop in De Kalb County for many years. As late as 1857 in South Grove Township

alone it was estimated that more than 100,000 bushels of wheat were raised.⁶¹ One De Kalb farmer used one bushel of wheat seed per acre and reaped twenty-five bushels per acre in return, or 250 bushels of wheat for the season. His corn yield was forty-five or fifty bushels per acre, or a season corn total of 350 to 400 bushels.⁶² This seems reasonable as R. Carlyle Buley reports some farmers in Michigan getting thirty-five to forty bushels of wheat to the acre and seventy to eighty of corn. Another reported twenty-five bushels of wheat in the first season.⁶³

Improved horsepowered and treadmill threshers came into use in the late 1830s which helped the pioneer farmer increase his output per man hour. These relatively improved threshers were first introduced into Illinois along the line of the National Road in the southern part of the state. In De Kalb County these crude, heavy, wooden affairs required four to six strong horses to revolve the gears and had a capacity of thirty to sixty bushels per day. The grain had to be fanned separately.⁶⁴

Stock raising was as important to the farmer as agriculture. Horses and oxen for transportation and power and cattle for milk and meat for domestic consumption were produced by most farmers. The "razorbacks, land sharks," and other hogs of such breeding, or lack of breeding, which when fattened never averaged over two hundred pounds, held

their own long after the merits of improved breeds were demonstrated.

They are long-nosed, thin creatures, with legs like greyhounds, and seem to be the kind formed for speed and agility among swine, as they think nothing of galloping a mile at a heat, or of clearing fences which a more civilized hog would never attempt.⁶⁵

In northern Illinois swine raising was somewhat restricted because of a law that prohibited swine running at large because of possible crop damage.⁶⁶

When much grazing land was still open to all settlers of Illinois, cattle were allowed to range and breed naturally and more or less irregularly. As a result calves frequently arrived during severe winter weather and come spring failed to survive. Those who did survive were rounded up and put in pens as inducements for the cows to come home at night.⁶⁷ When a state law with severe penalty was passed to prevent small bulls of scrub stock running at large, a howl of protest rose from the common folk who upheld the rights of the small bulls. The measure was regarded as class legislation in favor of the rich who were seeking to profit from the breeding services of their large bulls. Besides, "there was a generous feeling in the hearts of the people in favor of an equality of privileges, even among bulls."⁶⁸ Nothing was said about the cows.

Fencing was a serious problem in De Kalb County. One settler "went daily to our wood lot, a mile and a half

distance, cut down the big trees, sawed and split them into rails, posts, and pickets. By spring we had cut enough to enclose a hundred acres, by joining neighbors' fences."⁶⁹ Another settler had this to say: "4480 rails will fence forty acres. We made rails principally from red oak, but some white oak and some of black walnut is used."⁷⁰ According to another settler, rails cost three dollars to four dollars per hundred, when they were to be had, as contrasted to one-third that amount in timbered areas.⁷¹ At this price it would cost \$100 to \$150 to fence a ten-acre lot, or \$200 to \$300 for a forty-acre field.

Transportation was another important factor affecting the early farmer. One explained that when he moved into De Kalb County in the 1830s:

There were no railroads and no general markets nearer than Chicago, with prices there so low that often the proceeds of a load would not much more than pay for the hauling. We, as well as other settlers, did not expect to make more than a comfortable living on our farm.⁷²

Later he wrote, "The building of the Burlington and Quincy across the south end of the (De Kalb) county in 1851, and the Dixon Air Line Railroad across the center of the county in 1854, opened our eyes to possibilities of prairie farming." Before transportation came to the county, attitudes were expressed in this fashion: "How people toil for a little cash. They carry wheat many miles to Chicago and sell it for forty cents."⁷³

We never will know exactly what the early farmer always thought as he contemplated the land and his existence on it. Lost forever to us is most of that mass of thoughts and feelings which comprise the silent inner man of the old days, but enough remains to attempt a reasonable reconstruction of his life. The aim of this chapter was to try to understand the past through a limited number of direct quotes from old letters and other material. Beyond this point we must use our imagination and our sense of empathy, which is a reasonable guide, for in matters of economic gain, health, death, happiness, and the like, most men are the same; only the dates change. We can sense that these common everyday problems encountered by the early rural settler were similar to the same elemental problems faced in today's world. Hardships are part of everyman's life; for the rural pioneer it was an opportunity to raise a family and gain economic security by working the prairie and stocking it with fine animals. He also had to create the environment that permitted these values to become real. Not all made it, of course, but the achievements were striking. Rarely do we read of a family who "fled away from the tangible and intangible terrors of western frontier life."⁷⁴ Most lived relatively good lives, starting with little but adding to their acres so that in old age they could start their children on farms or rent to others.

FOOTNOTES

¹The acceptability of accuracy is based on a comparison of early county commissioners' and circuit court records found in the archives of De Kalb County with the same events recorded in county histories.

²Clarence Danhof, "Farm Making Costs and the 'Safety Valve': 1850-1860," Journal of Political Economy 49 (June 1941): 317-59.

³Henry Boies, History of De Kalb County, Illinois (Chicago: C. B. Bassett, 1859), p. 354.

⁴James Gaird, Prairie Farming in Illinois (London: Lonman, Brown, 1859), p. 62.

⁵Frank Dean, "History of De Kalb County, Illinois." Unpublished notes in the Illinois Regional Archives Depository at Northern Illinois University, De Kalb County, Illinois. Hereafter identified as IRAD.

⁶Statement of William Marshall Sebree. 1 October 1895. Taken from cornerstone box of Altgeld Hall, Northern Illinois University at De Kalb, Illinois, April 19, 1874. IRAD.

⁷E. W. Farnham, Life in Prairie Land (New York: Harper, 1855), p. 66.

⁸Boies, History of De Kalb County, pp. 351-352.

⁹Sarah S. Bryant to Rev. Thomas Snell, 31 March 1840, IRAD.

¹⁰Thomas J. McCormack, ed., Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896 (Cedar Rapids: The Torch Press, 1909), p. 331.

¹¹Jessie H., Rosdail, The Ikdal Family History (Chicago: Privately Printed, 1947), p. 48. Curt G. Hovland to a friend. Fox River, Illinois. 6 July 1838.

¹²Letter quoted in Lewis M. Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, Illinois (Chicago: Pioneer Publishing Co., 1907), p. 62.

¹³M. W. Ross to Francis Edmond, 25 April 1836, IRAD.

¹⁴Noak Beeds to Dan Hoit, 3 January 1837, IRAD.

¹⁵E. B. Washburne to John Dixon, no author, Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 6 (April 1913): 222.

¹⁶Louis A. Pierce to Henry Pierce, 28 April 1855, IRAD.

¹⁷Boies, History of De Kalb County, pp. 398, 407, 421, 456, 463.

¹⁸Jeremiah Church, Journal of Travels, Adventures, and Remarks of Jerry Church (Harrisburg: N. P. 1845), p. 306.

¹⁹Daniel Drake, A Systematic Treatise, Historical, Etiological, and Practical, on the Principal Diseases of the Interior Valley of North America As They Appear in the Caucasian, African, Indian, And Esquimaux Varieties of its Population (Cincinnati: 1850), p. 703.

²⁰Madge E. Pickard and R. Carlyle Buley, The Midwest Pioneer His Ills, Cures, and Doctors (Crawfordsville, Indiana: R. E. Banta, 1945), p. 17.

²¹David Thomas, Travels Through the Western Country in the Summer of 1816 (Auburn, New York: 1819), p. 214.

²²Edmund Flagg, "Letters From America," in Early Western Travels, 1748-1846 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1904), IX:189

²³Erwin H. Ackerknecht, Malaria in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1760-1900 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), pp. 5-7.

²⁴William Oliver, Eight Months in Illinois with Information to Emigrants (Newcastle: W.A. Mitchell, 1843), p. 77.

²⁵Pickard and Buley, The Midwest Pioneer, p. 15.

²⁶Lucius H. Zeuch, History of Medical Practice in Illinois, 2 vols. (Chicago: Cook Press, 1927), I:535-609.

²⁷Drake, A Systematic Treatise, p. 186.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 150-155, 711.

²⁹Illinois Monthly Magazine II (1832), 51.

³⁰Solon Buck, Travel and Description, 1765-1865, vol. LX of Collections of the Illinois State Historical Society (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1914), p. 178.

³¹S. A. Farrall, A Ramble of Six Thousand Miles Through the United States of America (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832) p. 118.

³²Sarah S. Bryant to Rev. Thomas Snell, 31 March 1840, IRAD.

³³Sarah S. Bryant to Sister Charity, 29 September 1844, IRAD.

³⁴Sarah S. Bryant to Sister Charity, 29 September 1844, IRAD.

³⁵Hildegard Binder Johnson, Order Upon the Land; The U.S. Rectangular Land Survey and the Upper Mississippi Country (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 17.

³⁶He refers to Henry M. Brackenridge, Views of Louisiana, Together with a Journal of a Voyage Up the Mississippi River in 1811 (Pittsburgh: Cramer Spen, 1840), p. 204.

³⁷John Bradbury, "Letters from America" in Early Western Travels, 1748-1846 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1904), V:204.

³⁸J. M. Peck, A Guide for Emigrants: Containing Sketches of Illinois, Missouri, and the Adjacent Parts (Boston: Lincoln and Edmonds, 1831), p. 183.

³⁹Christina H. Tillson, A Woman's Story of Pioneer Illinois (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1919), p. 45.

⁴⁰Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey, Lee and Carey, 1829), II:313.

⁴¹Morris Birkbeck, Notes on a Journey in America, Virginia to Illinois (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1818), pp. 117-118.

⁴²Rebecca Burland, A True Picture of Immigration (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1936), p. 70.

⁴³Bester Pierce to Brother Ira, 23 November 1856, IRAD.

⁴⁴Charles W. Marsh, Recollections 1837-1910 (Chicago: Farm Implement News Co.), pp. 26-39. Charles Marsh spent his early life in Shabbona Grove, De Kalb County, Illinois. He later, with his brother, invented an improved harvester machine and retired a rich man.

⁴⁵J. Hart Rosdail, The Sloopers, Their Ancestry and Posterity (Broadview, Illinois: Norwegian Sloop Society of America, 1961), p. 69.

⁴⁶Percy Wells Bidwell and John T. Falconer, History of Agriculture in the Northern United States, 1620-1860 (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), p. 210.

⁴⁷W. J. Beecher, "The Lost Illinois Prairie," Chicago Historical Society Journal (Spring-Summer, 1973), p. 167.

⁴⁸William Oliver, Eight Months in Illinois with Information to Immigrants (Newcastle Upon Tyne: William Mitchell, 1843), pp. 97-100.

⁴⁹Bidwell and Falconer, History of Agriculture, p. 103.

⁵⁰Charles W. Marsh, Recollections, p. 98.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 174.

⁵²Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, XIX (1926-27), 107.

⁵³Henry Clyde Hubbart, The Older Middle West, 1840-1880 (New York: Macmillan, 1936), p. 67.

⁵⁴Oliver, Eight Months in Illinois, p. 86.

⁵⁵Bidwell and Falconer, History of Agriculture, p. 339.

⁵⁶Ad in Hennepin, Illinois, Journal, August 24, 1838.

⁵⁷Allen G. Bogue, From Prairie to Cornbelt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 126.

⁵⁸F. Pierce to Cousin Henry, 3 June 1855, IRAD.

⁵⁹Charles W. Marsh talking about his farm in De Kalb County, Illinois, 1853. Marsh, Recollections, p. 45.

⁶⁰John G. Clark, The Grain Trade in the Old Northwest (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1966), p. 86.

⁶¹Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 469.

⁶²Bester Pierce to Ira Pierce, 23 November 1856, De Kalb County, IRAD.

⁶³R. Carlyle Buley, The Old Northwest, II:87, 95.

⁶⁴Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 385.

⁶⁵Oliver, Eight Months in Illinois, pp. 80-81.

⁶⁶Frederick Gerhard, Illinois As It Is (Chicago: 1857), p. 368.

⁶⁷Thomas Ford, A History of Illinois, From Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847 (Chicago: S. C. Griggs, 1854), p. 107.

⁶⁸Oliver, Eight Months in Illinois, pp. 102-103.

⁶⁹Marsh, Recollections, p. 40.

⁷⁰Cyrus Bryant to Sarah Bryant, 8 April 1833, IRAD.

⁷¹Marsh, Recollections, p. 56.

⁷²Ibid., p. 68.

⁷³Cotton Morton to Alphaus Longley, 25 October 1842, IRAD.

⁷⁴Anne McClure Hitchcock, "Some Recollections of Early Life in Illinois: Lake County in 1840" (N. P.) p. 8, IRAD.

CHAPTER VI

TRANSPORTATION AND DE KALB COUNTY

The early pioneer had great economic expectations when he arrived in De Kalb County. For these expectations to become a reality, the means to transport large volumes of produce to a reliable market would first have to be established. The web of transportation that would properly serve the counties of northern Illinois would of necessity be complex and would involve much planning and the expenditure of large sums of money. And it would be predicated upon the growth of a marketing center with the supportive facilities to collect, store, and transship the produce of the farm counties. When proper transportation was finally developed, it would completely change the economy of De Kalb County. Improved roads, canals, and railroads all helped to loosen the bonds which fettered the local agrarian economy of De Kalb and other northern Illinois counties in the early nineteenth century, but the core of the change was, as George Rogers Taylor states, "the cheapening and facilitation of the movement of goods and persons."¹

A glance at a map shows that, whereas Illinois is practically encircled by natural waterways, the interior of the state, which is by far the most fertile portion, is,

with few exceptions, without natural means of transportation.² In the history of Illinois, various attempts had been made to provide a comprehensive system of internal transportation, but the results were of slight importance. The most successful of such undertakings was the Illinois and Michigan Canal, which opened for business in 1848 and extended from Chicago to LaSalle.

For a number of years, it was of great value. In terms of the depth of area served, it was rather limited. Its width prevented the use of large and economical canal boats; frequent breaks in the locks made navigation difficult even during the summer months; and, finally, ice rendered the canal useless during the winter season.³ The legislature, as well as private citizens, had made many efforts to supplement the canal with a system of railroads. As early as 1837, the General Assembly had planned an extensive system of internal improvements, and, without accurate surveys or estimates, ten million dollars were appropriated to build twelve hundred miles of railroad, deepen the rivers of the state, and provide numerous turnpikes. Millions were borrowed, and expended with a lavish hand, but mismanagement, corruption, and the exhaustion of public credit at a time when all financial undertakings were paralyzed by the panic of 1837 brought the state to the verge of bankruptcy. A few surveys, a hundred miles of half-completed railway embankment, and one poorly con-

structed railroad, utterly useless for traffic, were the results of this experiment.⁴

The unsolved problem of an improved means of communication which would bring the New West into closer and cheaper relationship with the eastern cities was recognized as of prime importance by the cities themselves and by the interior settlements. The essential fact was that bulky farm products from De Kalb could not incur the transportation charges and compete in eastern markets.⁵ In addition, the cost of carrying merchandise back to interior counties by way of New Orleans or by way of Chicago greatly enhanced its cost to the consumer.⁶

It is clear, then, that the low price of local produce was consumed by the expense of taking it to market. Under such conditions the commerce of the county was nominal, and nothing but necessity prompted the inhabitants to engage in it. The farmer had no motive to increase the production of his fields beyond the needs of his family. For years the only demand which existed in the interior settlements was from the new settlers who moved into the area. The lack of a commercial market also lessened the demand for imported commodities and drove the remoter settlements of northern Illinois, in a large measure, to a self-sufficing economy.

This self-sufficing economy would change rapidly as the region developed. An early settler writes:

This country is not an uninhabited, uncultivated region, but the emigrant has broken upon the stillness and turned the soil to the sun. These fields which but yesterday were broad wastes, are now waving with corn and enriching the cultivator with rich harvests.⁷

We also read that "the whole northern part of the state exhibited a most extraordinary improvement in the year 1836."⁸ Another report describes how local improvements were continually being made. "New farms are being commenced, good roads, bridges, fences, the school house, the court house, the churches can be seen in every direction."⁹ An early historian wrote that "such a deluge of men, women and children, cattle, and sheep, has literally poured over the northern section of the state."¹⁰

In the northern part of the state, these settlements first took place along the rivers because they provided power for mills and transportation for the produce of the farms. The villages of Aurora and Elgin, for example, were located on the Fox River because of the availability of water power.¹¹ The greatest pioneer activity was confined to the river districts, which became settled earlier than the prairie sections. Not only were counties lying along the rivers more densely populated than the prairie regions, but within them the river townships were the most thickly settled. In Lee County by 1850, more than one-fourth of the total population lived in the townships along the Rock River. In the same year, McHenry County's three river townships, Richmond, McHenry, and Algonquin, had popula-

tions respectively of 1,078, 1,176, and 1,455 and were the most densely settled townships in the county. Ogle County on the Rock River increased its population from 3,479 in 1840 to 10,000 in 1850, which represented an increase of 187 percent. De Kalb County had a 344 percent population increase in 1840 of 1,697 and another increase of 7,540 in 1850, and had no great rivers to offer needed transportation to the early settler.¹² Although the percentage growth in De Kalb County was greater than that of Ogle County, the beginning and ending figures were far less because the county lacked river transportation.

Typically, the earliest settlers were on or near water which had to be navigable at least for small boats during part of the year. The settlements could not be far from water, for the prices paid for the bulky products of the farm, corn and wheat, could not absorb the cost of extended transportation by land routes.

As an early part of the transportation system of northern Illinois, the rural road was poor by any standard, sometimes hardly more than a path across the land. With rain, they were muddy, and when dry, a powdered surface of dust. The largest stones and stumps were removed only as far as was absolutely necessary to provide passage.¹³ In wet places, logs were laid crosswise, but corduroy roads were never satisfactory. Across the rivers, a few wooden bridges had been built, but for the most part fords or

ferries were the only recourse.¹⁴ To speak of roads as being "provided for" or "laid out" gives no idea of the means for travel available to people of the early day. A road in a statute book or on a map is one thing; the actual road might be anything from a morass to a passable affair. Most of these roads were at best only cleared and partially graded paths and at worst mere traces made by one man on horseback following in the tracks of another, "every rider making the way a little easier to find, until one came to some slough, or swampy place where all trace was lost."¹⁵

Most of the roads stretching to the west of Chicago crossed wide stretches of level prairie which make good roads only in dry weather. High water stopped all travel. In transporting produce, circuitous routes were often taken by those lacking in patience rather than stopping and camping on the banks of the river "for weeks at a time, waiting for low water."¹⁶ Besides these usual conditions, "an almost impassable morass of some five miles in breadth," had to be crossed before the journey's end could be gained by those coming from the west to the Chicago market.¹⁷ In an attempt to standardize road building in the state, Illinois passed a road law in 1835 that contained the following provisions:

That a supervisor was to be appointed by county commissioners to be vested with construction of roads.

That every male was to work for three days a year in his county on roads.¹⁸

Road laws worked well in the southern part of the state where population was heavy, but transportation facilities and land travel in northern Illinois remained in poor condition primarily because of lack of funds. In fact, "few direct appropriations were made of the state treasury prior to 1837 for improvement of highways."¹⁹

In De Kalb County, early county roads were established by act of the County Commissioners after receiving a petition from local farmers. One such handwritten petition reads as follows:

To the honorable County Commisioners of De Kalb County at their September term. Your petitioners citizens of Sycamore and Orange precincts respectfully present to this court, that their own as well as the public convenience requires that a road running in a northerly and southerly direction, on the east side of Big Grove, from the north Kishwaukee road to the Daniels road, should be laid out immediately. Therefore your petitioners pray this court to appoint at their present term three discreet and disinterested viewers residing in Kingston on the south part of Orange precinct, to view and locate a road to commence at the most proper point on the north Kishwaukee road at or near the Genoa Post Office, then in a southerly direction through or by the Pettijohn Point on the east side of Big Grove terminating at the most proper point on Daniels' road at or near Sycamore Post office, having in view the best ground and most direct route, the convenience of the Public and the accommodation of the settlement through which it projects. Dated Sycamore Precinct 13 August 1837.²⁰

This is followed with thirty signatures. Another petition reads as follows:

To the Honourable the Commissioners of the County of De Kalb your petitioners the undersigned, prayeth that your honorable body would grant a view for a road beginning at the village of Sycamore, or on some point of a road from the town of Genoa to Sycamore, running

to a point of Charters Grove at or near Matthew McCormick's house, thence running to the town of Genoa to intersect the road running from Foxview to Genoa at the most convenient point, as such a road is considered necessary for the convenience of the settlers in Charters Grove. We respectfully request that your honorable body would appoint Matthew McCormick, Amos Strong, and James Armstrong as suitable persons to view said road. Dated 1837.

This is followed by thirty-eight signatures.²¹

Similar procedures were followed through the early period in securing a new road within the county. If the viewers reported favorably on its value, the county board appointed one or more supervisors who proceeded to " . . . call all hands."²² One entry ordered the supervisors " . . . to proceed to cut a road sufficient wide to admit waggons (sic) to pass each other, but not to do injury to any fences or farms."²³ The road work levy, at least in the earliest period, was for all persons within a mile of the road.²⁴ Such levies did not include work animals. When the job required oxen, the owner was reimbursed.²⁵ In 1842, the road width was increased from fifty feet to sixty-five feet, and in some cases to eighty feet.²⁶

The present county road supervisor has in his possession, and continues to use, the original road supervisor's book for South Grove Township in De Kalb County. This book gives road cost information from the early years as shown below.

Pay Outs²⁷

Feb. 28, 1852.	Services as Commissioner of highway	\$3.50
April 22, 1852.	Paid Dan Lamb for surveying road in 1850 on petition of Baber and Tindall.	\$1.50
Sept. 18, 1852.	Paid Eli Barns for survey land on petition.	\$2.50
Feb. 21, 1857.	Paid R. Miller for repair of damage on road.	\$58.20
March 2, 1858.	Paid John Jones for repair of damage on road.	\$124.40
March 10, 1858.	Paid John Williams for repair of road.	\$6.90

Besides the few main roads in De Kalb County, there were a great number of ordinary country roads. Each farmer had to establish a road from his farm which would connect to other local roads. It is a matter of conjecture that until all the land was entered and under cultivation, that whenever possible farmers cut straight across the prairie to their destination. Many of these trails had to be abandoned when new farms were established, and eventually most of the roads followed section lines.

In 1844 a meeting was called in the village of Sycamore to discuss plans for building better roads to the principal markets. A resolution was adopted which stated:

Whereas, the large amount of agricultural products yielded by the fertile soil of Illinois which require transportation from this county to the City of Chicago with the vast and equally increasing amounts of mer-

chandise, lumber, iron, and salt, rendered necessary from the city to the county, call urgently for some better throughfare than now possessed.²⁸

The basis of their complaint was the backwardness of Illinois roads. The Whisky Road was one of several main roads extending westward from Chicago. It "was a fair sample of them all," according to Edward O. Gale.

When the frosts had come and the flowers gone, when the rains had filled the ground with moisture . . . making every depression a slough . . . then the wheels of the wagon sank to the hubs and the hearts of the drivers sank correspondingly. The spring was worse, if possible, than the fall. Woe to the farmer who should presume to transport anything without a caravan of neighbors to assist with extra teams to pack the bags of grain from one stalled wagon to another.²⁹

With such transportation problems to contend with, is there any wonder that interior counties such as De Kalb had been slow in settling? The comparatively few farmers who had located on the prairie, distant from water transportation or roads, were compelled to make long journeys to Chicago to exchange their produce for a few simple necessities. Upon arrival it was not uncommon for a farmer to learn that the market to which he had come was overstocked. Under these conditions, he could count himself lucky if he succeeded in disposing of his load for enough to defray the cost of his trip. To take a load of wheat to Chicago, get lumber and supplies, and return might take a week or more. Twenty miles a day was considered good traveling. One yoke of oxen could be used unless the load was heavy when two or three yoke were used.³⁰

In Chicago, Benjamin W. Raymond, Walter L. Newberry, and William B. Ogden, all of whom were in later years to have a hand in the organization of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, were among the speakers at a large public meeting held in June 1840 to consider the possibility of building a turnpike across the nine-mile swamp west of the city.³¹ It was hoped that this turnpike would help draw into the city produce from the western counties which might otherwise be lost to other towns on the lake to the north and along the Mississippi River. The road was to be sixty-five feet wide with a crown of three feet and ditches of three feet in depth on the sides which would drain through three culverts to be constructed over sloughs that drained the prairie.³²

This road improved transportation to the interior counties for a short distance. The editor of the Tribune remarked, " . . . the road had been perfectly dry and hard the whole season while the entire prairie was under water."³³ Yet, with all of the advantages to the counties west of Chicago, the road was permitted to deteriorate so much that in 1847 wrecks of wagons were scattered between Chicago and the Des Plaines River.³⁴ With the deterioration of the turnpike, another traveler had this to say:

The mud, when in its normal plastic condition, always seemed to be several feet deeper than on the prairie. Human ingenuity could invent no rougher or more detestable road to travel than was the pike at such times.³⁵

yet it was over roads such as these that it was estimated that by 1848, 70,000 teams were entering Chicago yearly from the western counties.³⁶

Other roads to the west developed in the late thirties which became important highways during the following decade. One of these was the High Prairie Road that crossed the Des Plaines River at Laughton's Ford and continued west through Naperville to Dixon's Ferry where it joined the road leading from central Illinois to Galena.³⁷ Rivaling it in importance was the Upper Galena Road which ran through Freeport, Rockford, and Elgin, linking De Kalb and other Rock River counties to Chicago.³⁸ Later other roads branched from these highways or paralleled them to serve as arteries of travel and transportation.

There were many unimproved roads leading into the great highways that drained into Chicago from the West, many of which are unknown and forgotten today. The original surveyor's map of De Kalb County traced a road which on his map was called the State Road. This road passed through Sycamore and terminated at Oregon, Illinois. Today only part of this road can be identified as Illinois Route 64.

The old settlers had difficulty in agreeing upon the location of the De Kalb County seat. It was pointed out that the Great State Road from Vandalia, at that time the capital of the state, would pass through Sycamore; that the

Old State Road, from Chicago to the West, would also cross at Sycamore and would make it a better location than any other proposed location.³⁹ The section of the Great State Road that passed through Sycamore was made eighty feet in width.

Communications continued to improve somewhat, for as early as 1835 a semi-weekly stage line was inaugurated between Galena and Chicago, passing through De Kalb on the Old State Road.⁴¹ By 1841, the 160 miles between Chicago and Galena were covered by thrice-weekly stages in good weather in less than two days.⁴²

From these early stage routes there evolved a web of lines radiating from Chicago in all directions. But what was accomplished in transporting passengers was done in the face of road conditions that were in many places singularly bad. Stage coaches or grain wagons, with their large wheels, in spite of bad roads could make their way across the prairie by using extra teams.⁴³

Bad enough in the late 1830s, roads became an increasingly serious problem in the economic growth of northern Illinois, which regarded its highways as the essential arteries of commerce. The increasing use of these primitive roads by travelers resulted in the establishment of inns, one of which was located in Genoa, De Kalb County. This early inn was erected by one of the first settlers,

Thomas Madison. He built a block house that measured sixty by sixteen feet but sold it in 1840 to Horatio Perkins who added a second floor to the building and operated it as an inn for travelers bound for Elgin or Chicago. This inn, called the Madison House, was granted a tavern license in 1838⁴⁴ and was "crowded with occupants," some of whom used a new stage route established in 1840 which ran between St. Charles and Oregon, Illinois.⁴⁵ All of this description gives one an impression of a road system beyond reality. Boies records a truer picture:

A line of stages ran from Elgin to Galena. Chicago was then the market for this section of the country, and to enable travelers to identify that road on the broad unbroken prairie, they annually plowed up a series of parallel furrows on each side of the track, and this was about all of the road work that was done.⁴⁶

And yet this road system worked. The roads enabled people to get where they wanted to go and receive what they needed. With transportation costs from the East somewhat reduced, by 1835 the volume of forwarding trade from Chicago increased fourfold to the newly settled counties in northern Illinois as far west as Galena.⁴⁷

Plank roads, a Russian invention used successfully in Canada, briefly helped to get the prairie roads out of the mud. First among the states, the Illinois legislature in 1849 authorized incorporation of plank-road companies.⁴⁸ Heavy planks, usually about three inches thick and eight feet long, were laid across stringers, which were placed

parallel with the direction of the road and set solidly into the roadbed. The original cost appears to have been low relative to that for turnpikes. Plank roads were built for as little as one thousand dollars per mile and averaged perhaps from fifteen hundred to eighteen hundred dollars.⁴⁹

Committees from the different communities along the road from Chicago to Rockford met in Elgin on August 15, 1844, and offered a resolution to the effect that the best means of coping with conditions between the Rock and Fox River valleys and Chicago was the chartering by the General Assembly of a company empowered to construct a good plank road from Chicago by way of Elgin to Rockford. They also held, in view of the productiveness "in wheat and other agricultural staples" of the northern counties of Illinois, that "the interests of the city of Chicago require that a prominent overland thoroughfare should lead Northwesterly from the city."⁵⁰ Although committees on construction and legislation were appointed, one reporting on the estimated cost of \$312,831.29, the other obtaining the desired charter, the movement was without result.⁵¹

Interest in plank roads continued, and on January 20, 1848, a contract was let to build such a road, which was opened to traffic in September 1848. This was a ten-mile plank road eight feet in width and was built of three-inch planks laid crosswise upon heavy sleepers between Chicago and the Des Plaines River. In the first month, tolls of

fifteen hundred dollars were collected, which attracted other companies to the plank road business. As a result, within several years plank roads extended as far west as Sycamore, Genoa, and De Kalb County.⁵²

Not only were these roads beneficial to those who promoted them, they aided in the development of Chicago and counties to the west. A newspaper reported that "from no other improvement has Chicago derived more direct benefit in proportion to the capital invested than from the plank road."⁵³

A plank road notice was found in a Chicago newspaper:

Notice is hereby given that the books for subscription to the capital stock for a plank road extending from the south side of Chicago city to the North line of Will County. Other roads will be planned for the west and northwest directions in the future.⁵⁴

Transportation was so improved that a farmer could travel ten or twenty miles on the plank road with the greatest ease and in less time than six miles on an unimproved road.⁵⁵ The farmer could haul larger loads and make better time than formerly and with less wear and tear upon wagon and animal. "Stiffness, decay and death," said the Chicago Daily Democrat, "are the necessary results of over-taxing the animal's energy. In this respect alone, plank roads would confer a lasting benefit to the country; they would save an immense loss in the wear and tear of wagons and in the deterioration of stock."⁵⁶

Basic arguments for plank roads as against early

railroad transportation were spelled out in an early Chicago newspaper:

With a sudden increase in the goods to be carried there would be no group of directors to reap benefits by carrying only those goods in which they were interested, as it was charged was done in a neighboring state. Also, railroads will take on and discharge passengers at stations which are usually ten to twelve miles apart. The Plank road will carry passengers as fast and with greater safety than the railroad, and at lower cost.⁵⁷

Even with all of the benefits outlined, the decline of the plank road was almost as rapid as its rise. A decade sufficed to span the rise and fall of their popularity. The decline was attributed to rapid deterioration of the planks with high cost of replacement.⁵⁸ Weather warped and twisted the lumber, rain washed out sections, and farmers, sometimes disgusted with the state of the highways, carried away the planking for their own use.

Throughout the early 1840s, De Kalb's agricultural development was hampered not only by the seasonal impassability of roads but by high freight rates induced by poor conditions of the roads. At the Rockford Railroad Convention of 1846, the cost of wagoning wheat to Chicago was set at twenty-five cents a bushel per hundred miles as against a probable charge of eight cents on the projected Galena railroad.⁵⁹ The cost of transporting lumber from Chicago to De Kalb County was estimated by the same convention at six dollars and fifty cents per thousand board feet per hundred miles.⁶⁰

These high costs of carrying produce necessarily restricted the area of Chicago commercial activity. In the case of De Kalb and other northern counties, bad transportation led them to consider, for the moment, other market-places.⁶¹

In an article in the Chicago Democrat, the editor seems to agree with those in the western counties:

On the improvement of the road over the wet prairie from Chicago to the west, depends whether the merchants, as well as the farmers, on or near the Rock River, shall form their future business alliances at points of steamboat landings on this river or the Mississippi, or at Chicago, where their natural course of trade should be.⁶²

That there was some shipment of produce over to the Rock River for shipment to the South is established.⁶³ But river shipments to New Orleans failed to meet the needs of the county. The Mississippi and its branches were often obstructed by low water, and flatboat traffic was also threatened by dangers from floods. Moreover, weather conditions on the lower river jeopardized the cargoes, for flour and pork were apt to spoil in transit. In addition, the market at New Orleans was precarious in comparison with the more cosmopolitan market at New York.⁶⁴

Shipment from De Kalb County through St. Louis to the Atlantic cities by way of New Orleans was circuitous and expensive for domestic trade. Often the supply exceeded the demand, the the price was therefore correspondingly low.⁶⁵ As a port New Orleans was remote from the great

ocean highways of the Atlantic, which caused fewer ships to seek cargo there than at the eastern seaports. This caused the port to be at a competitive disadvantage relative to eastern cities where traffic was heavy.⁶⁶

In the East, the ports were well located with regard to the most frequented trade routes between Europe and America and had become the chief importing sector in the country. They attracted the larger ships, which were better suited to handle the export trade of northern Illinois. Since the bulk of the produce of northern Illinois sent to New Orleans was reshipped to eastern ports for export, there was every incentive for producers to avoid the long journey to the South. An east-west route presented few of the difficulties that were evident on the Mississippi River. There were fewer risks in navigating the Great Lakes and almost none on the Erie Canal. The problem was to get the products of De Kalb County to the lake side of Chicago.

To what extent Chicago became the market for northern Illinois is shown by the commercial growth of her port. During the first few years, Chicago's trade was primarily an import trade, as would be expected in a new country. By 1836 the exports were valued at one thousand dollars; imports were worth \$325,203. During the following years, this relationship changed. Imports in 1842 were estimated at \$664,347, while exports were valued at \$659,305. By

1847 imports and exports were worth respectively \$2,295,000 and \$2,641,000.⁶⁷ Other statistics show rapidly increasing activities in Chicago during the next few years as seen in Table 9 on the next page.

As shown in Table 9, receipts of farm produce for shipment East by way of the Great Lakes rose rapidly, and a study of the movement of wheat, flour, and corn shows a steady increase in 1847. In 1848 a great increase in the volume of trade occurred at Chicago, and this was maintained through the years indicated in the table. This improvement in the export trade was due chiefly to the opening of the Illinois-Michigan Canal in 1848 and to relative improvement in farm roads which conveyed farm products to Chicago from points west and northwest of the city. These transportation facilities tapped the upper Mississippi trade in favor of Chicago and the East-West route to the Atlantic seaboard. But other means of transportation from the northern counties were necessary. The Canal was too far to the south of the counties of northern Illinois, and roads, although improved, were still affected by weather conditions and rapid deterioration. The solution to the transportation problems of northern Illinois counties would be found only in the construction of the railroad.

TABLE 9

EASTWARD SHIPMENTS FROM CHICAGO BY THE GREAT LAKES

	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849
Wheat (bus.)	956860	1459594	1974304	2160000	1936264
Corn (bus.)	2790	11947	67315	550460	644848
Flour (bbls.)	13752	23045	32538	45200	51309
	1850	1851	1852	1853	1854
Wheat (bus.)	883644	437660	635496	1206163	1860636
Corn (bus.)	262013	323137	2757011	2729552	7252580
Flour (bbls.)	100871	72406	61196	70984	58573

Source: Hunt's Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review, VIII-XLIII (New York: 1843-60), XXXII, 686-692.

The movement to construct a railroad came to a head in a well-attended railroad convention held at Rockford, Illinois, on January 7, 1846. Here ten northern Illinois counties were represented by 319 delegates, including those from De Kalb County.⁶⁹ Actual planning began in 1847, when James Seymour surveyed a route for the new railroad. John Wentworth, who worked with James Seymour, recalled that they began:

At the foot of Dearborn Street and ran three lines nearly due west to the Des Plaines River, "much of the time we waded in water waist deep . . . and it was our lot to drive the first stake ever in the city for a railroad line."⁷⁰

Seymour recommended that the road be built from the Des Plaines River eastward to Chicago. His idea was to build a steam mill at the Des Plaines River for the preparing of the crossties, rails, and wedges from the timber available at that point. A small locomotive and railroad

car were to be used to carry the material as the laying of the wooden rails progressed eastward.⁷¹

Actual construction on the line, abandoned in the fall of 1838, was not resumed until the spring of 1848. In the meantime, the project had not been forgotten. The need was there and becoming greater every year with the growth of the counties surrounding Chicago.

In the fall of 1839, a Chicago editor still had hopes:

Every day convinces us more and more of the pressing importance of the immediate completion of this work. No one can see the immense number of loaded teams dragging their slow length along through the low and wet prairie from the west, and part of the way by the side of the foundations for a railroad, without being impressed not only with the necessity but the profitable character of this work . . . if trade and travel of this growing section of our state are to be secured to our vicinity, the Chicago and Galena Railroad should be built without delay. We understand that it is to be again commenced and finished over our nine miles next summer. We hope so.⁷²

This editorial did not achieve the desired results, but demand continued. In February 1841, sixty-four of Chicago's most prominent citizens joined in the following call for a public meeting:

We the undersigned, feeling the importance of taking some measure to induce the holders of stock of the Chicago and Galena Union Railroad Company to commence the building of said road; and believing that at the present crisis the interest of Chicago is deeply involved in the completion of this communication between the Rock and Fox Rivers and Chicago, do hereby call a meeting of the citizens of Cook County to be held at the City Saloon on Wednesday third of March, at two P.M. to take measures for the pursuance of an object in which we have so vital an interest.⁷³

Little was accomplished by this furor, for the railroad began only partial operation in 1848. But the need was real, and, finally, after much delay, construction began on March 1, 1848, and by December the line had completed ten miles. By 1849, twenty-one miles were completed. In 1853, it extended west to Freeport, west of De Kalb County, where it leased the tracks of the Illinois Central to reach Galena.⁷⁴ A second line, which left the Freeport branch line at St. Charles, cut laterally across Kane and De Kalb counties to the town of Fulton on the Mississippi River.⁷⁵

George Rogers Taylor writes that railroads built across Illinois in the 1850s "had no trouble in getting all the business they could handle."⁷⁶ In fact, the Galena, running west from Chicago, fared so well on agricultural traffic that it was able to pay an average annual dividend of 16 percent on its original capitalization during the first five years of its operation.⁷⁷ The number of bushels of wheat arriving at Chicago jumped from 937,000 in 1852 to 8,768,000 in 1856, and corn from 2,999,000 bushels in the former year to 11,888,000 in the latter.⁷⁸ In 1849 the Chicago wheat receipts from the Galena road were 171,365 bushels, and each succeeding year the shipments to Chicago showed an increase. (See Table 10.) The direct result of the successful service of the Galena as a freight carrier took the form of extremely liberal dividends to its stock-

holders. In 1856, these dividends were were 22 percent.⁷⁹

Many farmers, instead of hauling their grain to Chicago as they had done in the early days, were now delivering it at railroad depots. One newspaper reported that "as many as eighty teams at a time could be found unloading their wheat at points along the line to be shipped to Chicago."⁸⁰

TABLE 10

VOLUME OF TRAFFIC EASTWARD BY WAY
OF THE GALENA AND CHICAGO UNION RAILROAD

	1850-51	1851-52	1852-53	1853-54	1854-55
Wheat (bus.)	291113	299665	512344	1122068	1588901
Flour (bbls.)	44478	39121	39661	39867	86323
Corn (bus.)	142304	398825	469857	378057	2394305
Butter (lbs.)	161000	370830	932830	743568	1324782
Oats (bus.)	67789	208979	640604	762251	1716059
Lead (lbs.)	-0-	-0-	-0-	532081	3574074
Pork (lbs.)	3022850	4256170	9795600	6544063	26453348

Source: Annual Report of the Galena and the Chicago Union Railroad, 1851-56 (Chicago: Chicago Daily Press and Job Printing House, 1856), pp. 23-26.

The effect of the railroad versus existing roads on farm shipments from De Kalb to Chicago is hard to measure in exact terms. John Clark states that in 1849 the Galena Railroad carried less than 10 percent of Chicago's wheat receipts, and in 1850 22 percent. As late as 1850, then, "wagons were the largest single source of Chicago's wheat receipts."⁸¹

In 1849, six northern tier counties, including De Kalb, produced two million bushels of wheat, 21 percent of

the state's crop. By this same year, the Galena road had not reached Elgin, forty-two miles northwest of Chicago. Wheat, then, arrived at Chicago from established farms over a rural road system, although its shipment was expedited by the railroad.

Albert Fishlow asserts that railroads were clearly not ahead of demand when they expanded rapidly into a new area. The Galena was built to exploit the existing surplus of the Rock River Valley, "an area that had already contributed importantly to the grain export of 1847 and 1848."⁸² This pattern of railroads searching out the best opportunities for road building is shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11

THE PATTERN OF RAILROAD CONSTRUCTION IN ILLINOIS, 1848-1860

<u>YEAR BUILT</u>	<u>ENTIRE STATE</u>	<u>11 WHEAT COUNTIES*</u>
1848	10 miles	10 miles
1849	5	-0-
1850	47	47
1851	45	36
1852	140	68
1853	390	94
1854	906	146
1855	462	23
1856	409	40
1857	74	-0-
1858	56	35
1859	103	41
1860	58	-0-

Source: Albert Fishlow, American Railroads and the Transformation of the Ante-Bellum Economy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 173.

*Wheat counties are: Boone, De Kalb, Du Page, Kane, Lake, LaSalle, McHenry, Ogle, Stephenson, Will, and Winnebago.

There was considerable movement of produce eastward to the Chicago market by 1841; by 1846-47 the traffic was well started. With improved roads and the beginning of railroad transportation in 1848, the way was cleared for the movement to be carried out on a large scale. From that time on, the shipments became more pronounced year by year, particularly so as railroads were extended into the western part of Illinois. (See Table 12.)

TABLE 12

RECEIPTS OF SELECTED ITEMS IN CHICAGO'S COMMERCE,
1852 and 1859

Commodity	Unit	Galena RR. 1852	Galena RR. 1859
Barley	bu.	90,248	181,559
Corn	bu.	671,961	800,497
Oats	bu.	674,941	414,643
Wheat	bu.	504,996	2,886,047
Flour	bbl.	44,316	133,541
Wool	lbs.	244,662	190,100
Hides	lbs.	396,312	1,669,190
Hogs, live	no.	-0-	29,670
Hogs, dressed	lbs.	10,881,510	26,330
Beef	no.	-0-	15,346
Pork	no.	-0-	26,330
Cured meats	lbs.	1,836,084	4,617,360
Butter	pkgs.	9,587	-0-
Lead	lbs.	715,300	5,479,340

Source: The Daily Democratic Press, Annual Review, 1852, pp. 10-11. Chicago Board of Trade, Second Annual Statement, 1859, pp. 83-104.

De Kalb County and other counties to the west of Chicago were transformed from a prairie wilderness into one of the world's greatest agricultural regions between 1848 and 1860. The secret of this remarkable progress was

transportation, which opened the door to the farmer and merchant. Without good transportation, the agricultural and commercial development could not have taken place. It was the railroads which were primarily responsible for the course of economic development. There was no effective alternative that could have performed essentially the same role for De Kalb County.

FOOTNOTES

¹George Rogers Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York: Harper, 1951), p. 132.

²The territory tributary to parts of the Kankakee and Illinois rivers is an exception, but the size of this territory is comparatively small relative to the entire state.

³Chicago Daily Democrat, 8 April 1850; Alexander Davidson and Bernard Stuve, A Complete History of Illinois from 1673 to 1873 Embracing the Physical Features of the Country; Its Early Explorations; Aboriginal Inhabitants; Conquest by Virginia; Territorial Condition and the Subsequent Civil, Military and Political Events of the State (Springfield: W. H. Rokker, 1874), pp. 41-56.

⁴J. Moses, Illinois Historical and Statistical, 2 vols. (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co., 1889-1892), I, Chapter 6; see also, S. Augustus Mitchell, Illinois in 1837: A Sketch of the State of Illinois (Philadelphia, 1837), pp. 56-57; Theodore C. Pease, The Frontier State, 1818-1848 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), chapter X, XI. The difficulties with the Illinois and Michigan Canal and the failure of the experiment with state ownership of railroads are covered in detail by John H. Krenkel in Illinois Internal Improvements, 1818-1848 (Cedar Rapids, 1958); also see, R. Carlyle Buley, The Old Northwest Pioneer Period 1815-1840, 2 vols (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1951), 1:504-518; and James William Putnam, The Illinois and Michigan Canal (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

⁵Israel D. Andrews, Report of Colonial and Lake Trade (Washington: Robert Armstrong, Printers, 1853), p. 278.

⁶Ringwalt states that before roads and canals were developed, commerce upon the rivers was costly and that the natural impediments in the rivers made their navigation difficult and hazardous at all times and was often impractical. He reported that in 1826, for example, the amount of property descending the Susquehanna River was estimated at \$4,500,000. The losses occasioned by accidents incident to the river navigation, exposure to the weather, etc., he estimated at 5 percent. The gross amount of loss annually sustained, therefore, would be \$225,000. He concludes that river transportation, though sometimes speedy and convenient, is attended with uncertainty and danger. J. L.

Ringwalt, Development of Transportation Systems in the United States (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1888), pp. 9-13.

⁷Letter of Charles Butler, 27 June 1845. Chicago Historical Society, Manuscripts Collection, vol. 31.

⁸Chicago American, 16 July 1836.

⁹Ibid., 3 September 1841.

¹⁰Arthur C. Boggess, The Settlement of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1908), p. 188.

¹¹William V. Pooley, "The Settlement of Illinois from 1830 to 1850." Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, No. 220, History Series, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 106.

¹²Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States from the return of the Sixth Census (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Allen, 1841), p. 86; for the seventh census, see J. D. B. De Bow, Statistical View of the United States, A Compendium of the Seventh Census (Washington, D.C.: Beverley Tucker, Senate Printer, 1854), p. 702.

¹³Baynard Hall, The New Purchase; or Early Years in the Far West (New Albany, Ind.: J. R. Nunemacher, 1855), pp. 46-47.

¹⁴R. Carlyle Buley, The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1814-1840, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1951), I:463.

¹⁵Pooley, Settlement of Illinois, p. 489.

¹⁶Chicago Daily Journal, 28 February 1845.

¹⁷Daily Chicago American, 18 June 1840.

¹⁸Milo M. Quaife, Chicago's Highways Old and New, From Indian Trail to Motor Road (Chicago: D. F. Keller, 1923), p. 95; for a list of public roads laid out near De Kalb County, Illinois, in the years 1833, 1835, 1837, 1839, 1843, and 1845, see, Josephine Boylan, "Illinois Highways, 1700-1848, Roads, Rivers, Ferries, Canals," Illinois State Historical Society, Journal, 1933, vol. XXVI, numbers 1 and 2.

¹⁹John H. Krenkel, Illinois Internal Improvement (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1958), p. 19.

²⁰Illinois, De Kalb County. County Commissioners Records Road Petitions 1837, Box 12, De Kalb County Court House.

²¹Ibid.

²²Illinois, De Kalb County. County Commissioners Record Book. Session of July 13, 1839, p. 58.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., Session of April 8, 1850.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 394.

²⁷Illinois, De Kalb County, South Grove Township. Road Supervisors Book, 1849 to date.

²⁸Illinois, De Kalb County. County Commissioners Court, December 12, 1844, p. 388.

²⁹Edwin O. Gale, Reminiscences of Early Chicago and Vicinity (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1902), p. 129.

³⁰Helen Bingham, My Scrapbook of Collections and Recollections (Privately Printed, 1972), p. 15.

³¹Chicago Daily American, 8 June 1840.

³²Daily Chicago American, 15, 18, 25, June 1840.

³³Daily Daily American, 17 April 1841.

³⁴Chicago Daily Journal, 29 June 1849.

³⁵Gale, Reminiscences of Early Chicago and Vicinity, pp. 232-233.

³⁶Chicago Daily Democrat, 16 February 1848.

³⁷Chicago Democrat, 20 May 1835; also Quaife, Chicago's Highways, pp. 45-98. For a complete list of public roads and year of construction, see, Josephine Boylan, "Illinois Highways, 1700-1848."

³⁸Chicago Democrat, 26 September 1838.

³⁹Boice, History of De Kalb County, p. 390.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 390.

⁴¹Chicago Democrat, 25 February 1835.

⁴²Daily Chicago American, 12 June 1841.

⁴³Chicago Democrat, 9 June 1846.

⁴⁴Illinois, De Kalb County. County Commissioners Court Record Book, March Term 1838, p. 43.

⁴⁵Unpublished manuscript in possession of the present owner of Madison House, Mrs. Anita Schoonmaker. The fiddlers platform used to provide entertainment for guests in those days is still in place on the second floor of the building.

⁴⁶Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 453.

⁴⁷Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, p. 29.

⁴⁸Illinois, Session Laws 1849. First Session, Sixteenth General Assembly, p. 128.

⁴⁹Caroline E. MacGill et al., History of Transportation in the United States Before 1860, ed. Balthasar Henry Meyer (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1917), p. 300.

⁵⁰Chicago Democrat, 18 September 1844. The meeting emphasized the duty of citizens to subscribe for stock. If it were not possible to build a plank road all the way, then part of the way, and a "good graveled or macadamized road on the balance of the route" was suggested.

⁵¹Chicago Democrat, 4 December 1844.

⁵²Quaife, Chicago Highways, pp. 131-133; Daily Democrat, 22 January and 9 October 1848. One man reported that within one hour he saw ninety-six persons pass the toll gate, a rate estimated to bring twenty-four dollars an hour on a road costing sixteen thousand dollars.

⁵³Chicago Daily Democrat, 13 December 1848 and 31 May 1850.

⁵⁴Chicago Daily Journal, 18 January 1850.

⁵⁵Ibid., 4 September 1852.

⁵⁶Chicago Daily Democrat, 31 July 1850.

⁵⁷Ibid., 16 February 1848.

⁵⁸Quaife, Chicago Highways, p. 197.

⁵⁹Chicago Democrat, 29 January 1846.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., 4 September 1852.

⁶²Daily Chicago American, 25 June 1840.

⁶³Chicago Daily American, 9 April 1842.

⁶⁴Joseph Schafer, Four Wisconsin Counties, Prairie and Forest, Wisconsin Domesday Book, General Studies III (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1927), p. 41.

⁶⁵Thomas Ford, A History of Illinois (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Co., 1854), p. 98.

⁶⁶J. D. B. De Bow, The Industrial Resources, Etc., of the Southern and Western States: Embracing a View of Their Commerce, Agriculture, Manufactures, Internal Improvements, Slave and Free Labor, Slavery Institutions, Products, etc., of the South, etc., 3 vols. (New Orleans: Office of DeBow's Review, 1852) 1:388-389.

⁶⁷Quaife, Chicago's Highways, Old and New, p. 139; for an excellent background on the growth of Chicago's harbor, see, A. T. Andreas, History of Chicago, 3 vols. (Chicago: A. T. Andreas, Publisher, 1884), 1:239-243.

⁶⁸Hunt's Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review (New York: 1843-60), XXXII:686-692.

⁶⁹Chicago Democrat, 13 January 1846.

⁷⁰John W. Wentworth, Fort Dearborn (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co., 1881), pp. 76-77; also see, Andreas, History of Chicago, 1:246.

⁷¹Chicago American, 27 May 1847.

⁷²Chicago American, 27 June 1837.

⁷³Chicago Tribune, 27 February 1841.

⁷⁴William B. Ogden, Annual Report of the President to the Stockholders of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, 1849 (Chicago: 1849), pp. 3-4. Galena and Chicago Union Railroad Company, Seventh Annual Report (Chicago, 1854), p. 6.

⁷⁵Annual Report of the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, 1855, p. 27.

⁷⁶Taylor, The Transportation Revolution 1815-1860, p. 165.

⁷⁷Paul Gates, The Illinois Central Railroad and Its Colonization Work (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), pp. 85-86.

⁷⁸Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, p. 166.

⁷⁹Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, Ninth Annual Report, 1856, p. 20.

⁸⁰Chicago Daily Democrat, 2 February 1850.

⁸¹John C. Clark, The Grain Trade in the Old Northwest (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), p. 89; also see, Chicago Daily Tribune, 38 December 1850; also, "The Annual Amount of Trade and Commerce on the Upper Mississippi River, 1844," Senate Executive Documents, 28 Congress, 1st Session, No. 242 (1844). Serial 434.

⁸²Albert Fishlow, American Railroads and the Transformation of the Ante-Bellum Economy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 170.

CHAPTER VII

CRIME AND DE KALB COUNTY

In general, "vigilantism" describes men taking the law into their own hands, ostensibly in the name of a higher, unwritten need for social control. Most of these movements had as their objective the lynching of outlaw figures. In some cases, they functioned out of what they thought was sheer necessity during an effective legal vacuum. In others, they became high-handed, tinged with partisanship and overt criminality. Instances of the first sort are usually distinguishable by the general support of the local community for the actions of the vigilantes; these movements directly embody the will of the majority and exercise it without heeding customary legal forms. Such few legal authorities as did exist tended in these cases to cooperate with the vigilantes.

Vigilantism of this kind has usually been regarded favorably by leading public figures and by later historians.¹ It is generally seen as "socially constructive" in that it genuinely displaces anarchy with social order.² Yet, in its unrestrained and lawless application of majority will, it became the direct ancestor of such latter day expressions of vigilantism as race riots and lynching mobs,

and it is not far removed from the activities at the federal level of A. Mitchell Palmer in the 1920s and Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. These latter forms of vigilantism, by contrast to the socially constructive example, were divisive and factional in the immediate response they drew and tended to be universally condemned by later writers. And its leaders were often self-seeking and unconcerned with community norms.

The divisive and factional type of vigilante activity did not take place in northern Illinois, but rather it was a socially constructive type of vigilante activity, for the farmer in northern Illinois, despite his strong sense of individualism, was an upholder of the social order, and he was constantly recreating that order, although with some egalitarian modifications. Legislative government, the property system, and the family remained at the core of his life. The farmer may have been hostile to some legal restraints, but he automatically worked to create a civilization which contained new bonds and limits of its own, especially in those central areas of life whose patterns he took for granted.

At some point in time the early settler in De Kalb County could reasonably feel that he had achieved security for himself and his family. He had completed, to a degree, a shelter to provide comfort and out-buildings to protect his valuable farm animals. With these immediate demands

satisfied, one could expect that the settler would ponder the direction in which his rustic society was moving and work for its improvement. Much had been invested in coming to the farming frontier, and the settler had high expectations for his future. All that he possessed was gained through great personal sacrifice, and his concern now was to safeguard his economic position.

What he was looking for, of course, was social stability, a gain which in itself would lead to a more complex society for the farmer and the community, for it would call for the organization of a responsive government and the establishment of law and other social institutions. The construction of a stable social framework would allow the settler to pursue his interests in an orderly fashion following generally accepted rules of behavior. Those who deviated would be jailed and punished. The anarchistic world of the frontier had to be reformed into some sort of viable society, much like that in which the pioneer had lived before journeying to the new land. Basic to this new society would be the reestablishment of the older community values which had served so well in the past. Achieving this would be difficult but would bring an orderly and stable community life to the frontier.

Stability in the new land was not a natural occurrence, for during the 1840s and '50s counterfeiters and horse thieves plagued De Kalb County. Pioneer reminiscen-

ces and county histories recite gory details and describe the depredations of these "Banditti of the Prairie."³

These early criminals and drifters extended their activities through portions of Wisconsin, northwestern Illinois, and down the Mississippi to Missouri.

The vulnerability of the settler to horse theft needs no comment, but counterfeiting as a frontier evil is a bit less familiar. The money problem made itself felt at the national level in the age of Jackson in a number of famous issues, such as the Bank War, but it was no less a problem in the backwoods and border country. Not only did the frontier suffer from a money shortage, which counterfeiters as well as wildcat bankers tried to fill, but the frontier felt the lack of money especially in regard to the purchase of federal public land. Added to the demand for cash at the land office was the chaotic condition of the paper money system. The lack of an effective system of federal paper money and the plethora of private bank notes meant that never before nor since in our history was counterfeiting easier.⁴

We can take small comfort in thinking of violence as peculiar to the barbarian, for the movement of the frontier across the continent went hand in hand with various forms of violence. We do not need a sublimated instinct of aggression to account for outbreaks of violence, nor need we go to the opposite extreme to search for sick personali-

ties in order to explain acts of violence and destruction. The frontier placed a premium on independent action and individual reliance. Timid men never gathered the riches; the polite nearly never.

Society in De Kalb County as well as in other frontier communities was structured somewhat into three social levels:

- (1) The upper level consisted of the leading men, professional men, and affluent farmers.
- (2) The middle level encompassed farmers, craftsmen, and tradesmen.
- (3) The lower level included those who were marginal to or alienated from the community. They were probably viewed with contempt by the middle and upper levels who could not abide their way of life.⁵

The dangers of a takeover of newly settled areas beyond the reach of established law enforcement by the alienated outcast elements of a society was a real threat. Law enforcement was frequently inadequate. The local community lacked economic resources to support constables, policemen, and sheriffs in long journeys of pursuit after law breakers. Poor transportation was also a handicap. The mobility of sheriffs and others was only as rapid as the horse could travel. Within the county, the authorities were forced to make their way over poor roads and disappearing trails. In De Kalb County vigilantism arose as a response to the absence of effective law and order in the frontier community.

Fundamentally, the settlers took the law into their

own hands for the purpose of establishing order in the newly settled county. In the older settled areas the prime values of persons and property were dominant and secure, but the move to the frontier meant that it was necessary to reconstruct the value system. The harmful pressure of outlaws and marginal types operating in a context of weak and ineffectual law enforcement created the spectre and often the fact of social chaos.⁶

Because the main thrust of vigilantism was to reestablish the conservative values of life, property, and law, the vigilante movement in De Kalb County was led by the local elite. Among the local participants were several lawyers, a banker, and many of the larger land owners.⁷

In an article in the Dixon Evening Telegraph an old settler writes:

An empire of crime, extending from Lake Michigan to the Gulf was in existence. Locally the haunt of the outlaws passed through the swamps and groves of the Green River county and of Kaye Crest, the stream which flows northwest of Rochelle into the Rock River.

He adds:

Horse stealing was a principal activity and there was a well established trail along which the horses were ridden from hiding place to hiding place to eastern and southern markets.⁸

A local history records that the area covered by the activities of the gang:

Extended from one end of the country to the other. From Texas, up through the Indian territory, Arkansas, Missouri, and Illinois, to Wisconsin; from the Ohio at Pittsburgh through the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illi-

nois and Iowa, to the Missouri River as far as civilization extended.⁹

Another source reported a more believable sphere of operations: "A strong and well constructed net-work of organized crime stretched over this whole section of country."¹⁰

The local leader of the De Kalb gang was John Driscoll, who has been described as a "man of considerable height, over six feet, and all muscle. His face was repulsive, this being occasioned by a part of his nose having been bitten off some years before."¹¹ He and his four sons joined with the Brodie family, father and three sons, also from Ohio. John Brodie had a "very low forehead, stiff thick hair, small eyes set deep in his head."¹² It seems that reasonable looking people were never criminals. Boies describes the gang members as stern, fearless, determined outlaws.¹³ Yet another writer states that although repulsive and pirate-like in appearance, they were romantic, daring, fearless, companionable, and true to friends.¹⁴

William Driscoll was one of the first settlers in what is now known as South Grove Township in De Kalb County, and for years the grove was called Driscoll's Grove until the organization of the township. David, brother of William Driscoll, married a relative of the Brodies, and the two families became close friends. There in Driscoll's Grove was the hiding place for the booty which the gang

collected.¹⁵ No one dared leave a horse unguarded around the general area, for the outlaws proved to be very efficient horse thieves. And to keep their business unhampered by the law "the bandits either intimidated or controlled many of the local officials."¹⁶ Boies adds that:

In Ogle County to the west, and Winnebago on the northwest, the banditti were numerous. There, theft, counterfeiting, and the like constituted but a small part of the sworn duties of the gang.¹⁷

Boies describes the stolen horse traffic as moving from South Grove Township to the mill of E. P. Gleason, a counterfeiter and horse thief living in the village of Genoa, De Kalb County, on to Hampshire in Kane County, and north to McHenry County where some men, "now prominent as politicians and office-holders, were supposed to be connected with the gang."¹⁸

In March 1841 Ogle County authorities collected a few minor members of the gang in the jail at Oregon, Illinois. The local citizens were aware that on the following day, which was Monday, the captured men would be put on trial in the nearly completed court house. About midnight Sunday a fire broke out in the new edifice and it was burned to the ground. This act of arson, a crime for which John Driscoll had been convicted in Ohio, coming on the heels of the horse stealing, robbery, and counterfeiting, served to prod the citizens into action.¹⁹

The residents conferred with Circuit Judge Thomas

Ford, later governor of Illinois, in an effort to find a way to rid thmselves of the gang activity. The judge, well aware of the strength of the outlaws and the impotence of local authority, unofficially advised that the local people form a band of armed man and punish them with a whip.²⁰ He also is reported to have said that if the bandits dared to disturb his family or property, he would gather a posse and take summary measures against them.

The Lynching Club, or Regulators as they were called, drew its membership from De Kalb and surrounding counties. The group elected as captain John Long, who owned a saw mill at Stillman's Run near the Rock River. When this became public knowledge, the gang descended on the mill and burned it.²² They "took Long's horse, broke its legs and left it to die in misery."²³ With this action, John Long resigned, and the Regulators elected John Campbell of De Kalb County as the new captain.

A gathering of the bandits in South Grove Township produced plans to put Captain Campbell out of action, which was not long in coming. "He met his assassins as he crossed from his house to the barn and was shot dead."²⁴

Naturally, the news of Campbell's death spread across the country. After the funeral the Regulators assembled, and their departure left the village of Rockford deserted "for all the men had left for the meeting."²⁵ The sheriff of Ogle County, having arrived early at the scene, depu-

tized a posse which followed the trail of the Driscolls and Brodies to their hiding place. Shortly after sunrise, they found stolen horses in David Driscoll's stable and found John Driscoll hiding nearby. Swept up in the dragnet were the other Driscolls, William and Pierce, all at the farm in South Grove Township. The Regulators removed the three Driscolls to nearby Washington Grove in Ogle County for trial.²⁶

The crowd that gathered numbered 500 or more, with 120 Regulators in attendance. Among those were lawyers, doctors, preachers, justices of the peace, and law officers.²⁷ Mr. E. S. Leland, later to become judge at Ottawa, Illinois, was chosen to direct the trial. Seating himself on the ground at the foot of an oak tree, he suggested to the Regulators to challenge any who were not members, and many were removed, leaving 111 in the circle. Within the circle, chairs were set up for the prisoners and witnesses, all in a semi-courtroom manner.²⁸ Jason Marsh of Rockford volunteered to serve as defense attorney.²⁹

William Driscoll received the first call to the witness chair. He was asked by Leland if he had instructed his brother David to go to Captain Campbell's pretending to be lost and then to shoot him. The accused answered that he did not. However, his testimony was contradicted by Henry Hill, who testified under oath that he heard William so instruct David Driscoll. William claimed he had said it

but only "in jest." John Driscoll was then questioned, and he denied having committed murder. He said he had stolen horses, "Yes, he had stolen about fifty or five hundred;" his mind was not too clear about the details or the count. Boies had Driscoll declare that he had lived an honest life since living in De Kalb County.³⁰ Then Leland asked the Regulators if they found the two, William and John, guilty as accessories to Campbell's murder. "What do you say gentlemen?" he asked the 111. "Guilty or not guilty?" The unanimous opinion was "guilty." And they were sentenced to be hanged.³¹

When the sentence was announced the condemned men begged that it might be changed and that they might be shot instead. The plea was granted. One hour was given to the condemned men to prepare for death. During that hour there was debate; some asked that the sentence be commuted to banishment, others that the Driscolls be tried by the regular courts. Those who wished to change the sentence lost the debate. The Regulators were determined to carry out the original sentence.³²

The 111 Regulators were divided into two firing squads, and at a signal, "fifty-six guns roared; the grove filled with the acid smell of gunpowder and smoke and John Driscoll's shattered body crumpled to the ground." Again the guns cracked and William's body fell beside that of his father.³³

The bodies were thrown into a brush-heap, and the crowd dispersed to their homes. Some stayed and covered the corpses with a foot or two of earth. A few weeks later the remains were removed and buried in Driscoll's Grove.

An interesting sequel to the Driscoll case occurred in Ogle County sometime later. On September 24, 1841, the Grand Jury presented bills of indictment against the 111 men accused of participating in the Driscoll trial and shooting. Judge Ford, later Governor of Illinois, presided. Without leaving the jury box, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty." As stated in the 1878 History of Ogle County:

This was the most exciting trial ever held in the circuit court, and perhaps embraced the largest number of persons ever arraigned under one indictment in the United States.³⁴

David Driscoll was never seen again, disappearing into the wilderness across the Mississippi River. Boies maintains in his history that William, at least, was absolutely innocent. Ironically, some six years later Taylor Driscoll was legally arrested and tried for the murder of Captain Campbell. Although Mrs. Campbell positively identified Taylor as one of the killers of her husband, a McHenry County jury in a properly convened court found him not guilty.³⁵

It is interesting to note that a few descendents of the Driscolls still live in De Kalb County. In a personal

interview, Mr. Fred Driscoll angrily denied the guilt of the condemned, claiming that they did not receive a fair trial. A final statement about the mob action appeared in the 1885 edition of a De Kalb County history:

Since the days of Cain, crime has existed in the world. While the county of De Kalb will rank with any other in the state as a law-abiding community, yet there have been some lawless characters among the greater number of law-abiding men and women.³⁶

Another episode of frontier reaction to lawlessness might properly be called "The Resurrectionists and Mob Action." Our story begins in 1842 in the small town of St. Charles, Illinois, on the Fox River where the Franklin Medical College came into existence.³⁷ No arrangements were made in those days for medical schools and hospitals to obtain corpses for dissection by medical students. Medical institutions frequently were willing to purchase a corpse from needy students who, in turn, obtained the corpse from newly made graves.³⁸

There had been suspicion about the Franklin Medical College for some time as several graves of citizens of De Kalb County had been emptied of their contents. In fact several of the students were found hovering near the new grave of a man recently buried in Sycamore, the county seat, and were arrested. One of those arrested was the son of Dr. Richards, president of the Franklin Medical College. Because of insufficient evidence, the students were released and advised to leave the county immediately.

Unfortunately, the grave robbers failed to heed the good advice. John Reed, a first-year medical student, and several others stopped at the Ohio Grove cemetery in Sycamore where the remains of seventeen-year-old Mrs. George Kenyon, a daughter of a prominent Sycamore man, had recently been buried. Removing the body, they covered the empty grave as best they could and carried the gruesome treasure back to St. Charles. The discovery was made soon after because several of her friends, uneasy about grave robbers, had fastened a twine fromn one side of the grave to the other and covered it with a layer of earth.³⁹ A day or two later they returned to see if the twine had been disturbed and discovered it had been removed. Digging into the grave, the father found the coffin empty; the grave cloths alone remained. With this discovery they did what we might expect them to do. They "dropped their spades, ran around like mad men, with heart-rending groans and bitter tears."⁴⁰

The next morning forty men armed with guns gathered in the little town of Sycamore for the journey to St. Charles. They started on their way and:

As the procession of wagons passed over the road to the east, residents and farmers living along the road and nearby learned what the excitement was all about and dropped their work to join the crowd. So, there was quite a sizeable group that entered the town of St. Charles.⁴¹

The crowd, now numbering about three hundred, surrounded the house of Dr. Richards. Seeing that there was no escape, one of the medical students called to the crowd that he had seen a corpse answering the description of the young girl, and with this, the father rushed to the door and fired his gun, killing the student John Reed.⁴² To prevent more shooting, the local constable obtained a promise to locate the body, which was found buried on the banks of the Fox River wrapped in a blanket.

The body was taken to the river, washed of the earth that adhered to it, wrapped it in some clothing, and placed it in a coffin to be brought back to Sycamore where a second funeral service was held in the Methodist Church. The body was consigned again to the grave.⁴³

The medical school was broken up, and grave robbing ceased to exist in De Kalb County. Although indictments were returned in the De Kalb County Circuit Court, no further action was taken; no one was ever brought to trial.⁴⁴

Other problems, touching on early violence, were the disputes concerning the boundaries of land claims and rights of claimants. Under the Pre-emption Act of 1841, pioneers could claim 160 acres on surveyed lands of the public domain and purchase this acreage prior to the public sale. Before the passage of this Act, the settler who settled anywhere on the public domain was actually a trespasser.⁴⁵ But the rights of settlers would have to be

respected, held sacred even; this was the prevailing attitude. If these rights were not respected, the settlers and others took matters into their own hands. The practice of not bidding against each other at the land auction, combined with making it unhealthy for any outsider who did so, was an old one. It was but a short step from this to the organization of formal land-claims associations.

On the fifth of September, 1835, two years before De Kalb County was organized, a meeting of settlers was held at the "shanty of Harmon Miller on the east bank of the Sycamore River" at which time a Claim Association was organized and a constitution was drawn up and signed by most of the settlers. They all agreed to abide by the decision of the five commissioners they selected and to aid in enforcing their decisions.⁴⁶

There was no enforceable law to settle disputes concerning the size, tenure, and boundaries of land claims, for it was believed that "at this period there was neither a justice nor statute books north of the Illinois River and west of Fort Dearborn, unless we except Ottawa and Chicago."⁴⁷

All who signed the constitution pledge their "life, fortune and sacred honor" to carry out the provisions of the code. The writer did not know if a copy of this document existed at the time he wrote in the Republican Sentinel but recalled some of its provisions. A committee

was to be chosen whose duty it would be to "examine into, hear, and finally determine all disputes and differences that existed between the settlers in relation to their claims." The decision of the committee was to be binding upon all parties. Each settler pledged to protect every other settler in the association in the "peaceable enforcement of his or her claim as aforesaid," and whoever refused to recognize the authority of the association should be "deemed a heathen, a publican and an outlaw" with whom they were pledged to have no communion or fellowship. The moral as well as the physical power of the association was apparently so great that if a speculator bid on a settler's claim, he was certain to find himself "knocked down and dragged out." Had the local land officers shown the least sympathy or favor to the "rascal" there would be no doubt that "an indignant and outraged yeomanry would have literally torn the land office to fragments in less than no time."⁴⁸

One unlucky fellow who bid on occupied land was "seized in an instant by the crowd of excited squatter-sovereigns, hustled away and nearly torn to pieces."⁴⁹ Henry Boies adds that while the association proved to be useful, there were many cases of injustice. "Men banded together in such organizations in order to keep by force of mob law other settlers from occupying and holding lands,

while they themselves held tracts of large extent and paid for none of it."⁵⁰

The claim association in De Kalb County had much support, including the Sycamore Republican Sentinel. We read that "all preemption laws are based on the principle: first come, first served!" It is seen by the editor that if the claim association did not exist all security to property would be at an end; that "domestic tranquility could not be insured nor could the general welfare be promoted." He believed that "claim associations and their authority had to be respected or society would be dissolved into original chaos."⁵¹

The association was also approved of by the local citizen. On the third of July, 1837, De Kalb County had its first election. The two parties involved in this election were the Claim-jumpers and the Anti-claim-jumpers, who were divided on the question of sustaining or abolishing the claim association. A large majority was found to be in favor of the Anti-claim-jumpers ticket.⁵²

In those early days regular government was virtually powerless, which forced the respectable leading men to take the law into their own hands. The resulting vigilantism and claims association activity can be viewed as socially constructive as it represented a genuine community consensus. When the original causes had been eliminated, the organiza-

tions were disbanded, and the county was left in a more orderly and stable condition.

The first term of the Circuit Court of De Kalb County was held in a small frame house owned by Rufus Cotton on October 9, 1838.⁵³ There were twenty suits on the docket, "none of which were sharply contested."⁵⁴ In the first suit, Erasmus Walrod was plaintiff and Stephen Harwood was defendant, but before the trial commenced it was settled by the parties.⁵⁵

The early society of De Kalb was not addicted to violent methods of settling personal quarrels. In the Circuit Court Records, Book A and Book B, which cover the period 1838 to 1852, there were no indictments for murder. The most extreme cases of violence recorded were for assault and battery, and there were only seven of these recorded throughout the period. On September 19, 1843, Abel Smith was indicted for assault with intent to commit murder. The plaintiff charged that Smith:

Spit in his face, that he had with great force and violence seized and laid hold of said plaintiff, that he tore out divers large quantities of hair, that he beat him violently with a stick, that he knocked him down and kicked him.⁵⁶

We will never know the outcome of the action because the defendant left the county for parts unknown.

Juries generally showed much leniency in most cases. A verdict of not guilty was often arrived at, while a few dollars and costs was the usual fine. As an example, a

local citizen was fined ten dollars for assault and battery.

That there were relatively few cases of violence is perhaps not surprising, although the literature of the age produced extended descriptions of violent frontier types, the half-horse and half-alligator individuals, who were found primarily in an earlier non-farming frontier society. Illinois was fast becoming a farming frontier; the frontier of the maladjusted had crossed the Mississippi River.

The violence of the farming frontier in De Kalb County was confined to fist fights; weapons were rarely used; There were more serious crimes of violence during the first days of county settlement when pockets of lawlessness existed which were atypical rather than typical.

An entirely different type of violence existed in the later period. From 1838 to 1845 there was only one indictment for riot, while after 1846 there were thirteen. One indictment for riot in 1847 included seven men.⁵⁷ The charges were dismissed, for juries seemed inclined to overlook such offenses. A few years later, and presumably because the county was becoming institutionalized, two men found guilty of riot paid a fine of fifty dollars each,⁵⁸ whereas five persons convicted of the same offense paid one dollar each in 1846.⁵⁹ At any rate, juries were not inclined to punish too harshly where no real damage was done.

There was no jail house during these early years, although an order was passed in 1849 authorizing one be built, not to exceed fifteen hundred dollars. However, nothing was done at the time.⁶⁰ In 1840 prisoners were confined in the sheriff's house "and other places as could be found for them." This proved so burdensome that few arrests were made or, as Boies records, "the great effort was to get them to run away so as to relieve the county of the expense."⁶¹

A certain amount of crime against property occurred all through the years. Such indictments included forgery, larceny, and trespass. Trespass, a very common offense, resulted from farming on land belonging to another owner or failure to pay for the land. One such indictment resulted in a fifty dollar fine.

Crimes involving sex were few. From 1838 to 1853 indictment for crimes of this nature can be summed up in a few words: one couple accused of adultery and fornication, and one charged with bastardy. The public view on these indictments is unknown; we cannot know the details concerning them because in each case the defendants were found not guilty. There were ten actions for divorce. In all of these cases the defendants were the husbands, and all had deserted. There was only an occasional perjury case; all were dismissed.

Shown on the next page is a summary of the

indictments recorded by the De Kalb County Circuit Court from 1838 to 1852.

In searching through the old court records, one instinctively gets the feeling that the law as administered through the courts was treated with great respect, and the the courts quickly gained the authority needed to preserve peace and to give justice to the citizens of the county even without the physical trappings that would come with the building of the court house in 1839.

Assault to commit murder	1
Assault and battery	6
Assist in escape of prisoner	1
Arson	1
Bastardy	1
Debt	25
Divorce	10
Foreclose mortgage	5
Forgery	4
Fraud	2
Fornication	1
High misdemeanor	1
Larceny	32
Neglect of duty as road inspector	1
Neglect of duty as road supervisor	6
Opening a grave	2
Perjury	2
Refuse to keep the peace	2
Riot	14
Running a saw mill on Sunday	1
Selling land second time	1
Selling liquor without license	6
Setting prairie on fire	1
Trespass	34

FOONOTES

¹John W. Caughey, Their Majesties The Mob (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 1-25.

²Richard Maxwell Brown, "The American Vigilante Tradition," in Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Burr, Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), pp. 154-226.

³See Edward Bonney, The Banditti of the Prairie (University of Oklahoma Press, 1963). There have been many vigilante movements in American history beginning with the South Carolina Regulators, 1767-1769, which occurred 160 years after the first permanent English settlement at Jamestown. The model for dealing with frontier disorder established by the South Carolina Regulators was utilized over and over again by American settlers. From the 1790s, and well into the nineteenth century, vigilante activity was generally local in Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, and Illinois, and was a response chiefly to frontier horse thieves, counterfeiters, and ne'er-do-well whites.

⁴On the relationship between counterfeiting and the frontier money shortage, see Ruth A. Gallaher, "Money in Pioneer Iowa, 1838-1865," Iowa Journal of History and Politics, 31 (1934): 42-45.

⁵Based on various readings. See, Stephen Ternstrom, Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Ray A. Billington, America's Frontier Heritage (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), ch. 5, "The Structure of Frontier Society"; Bernard De Voto, Mark Twain's America (Boston: Little, Brown, 1932), pp. 54-58.

⁶For various readings on vigilantism and violence in the United States see, for example: Richard Maxwell Brown, Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Burr, eds., The History of Violence in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Wayne Gard, Frontier Justice (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949); William John McConnell, Frontier Law: A Story of Vigilants Days (New York: AMS Press, 1974); Randall Parrish, Historic Illinois (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1906), pp. 505-6; William Faux, Memorable Days in America (1823); Early Western Travels, Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., vols. XI-XII, (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark,

1905), vol. XI, pp. 293-4; Robert M. Coates, The Outlaw Years (New York: Macaulay, 1901); William Cullen Bryant, Letters of a Traveler (New York: P. Putman, 1850), pp. 55-68; Thomas Ford, A History of Illinois (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Co., 1854), p. 249; James A. Rose, "The Regulators and Flatheads in Southern Illinois," Transactions (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society 11), 108-121.

⁷Biographical Record of Ogle County, Illinois (Chicago: S. J. Clark Publishing Co., 1899); L. M. Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, Illinois (Pioneer Publishing Co., 1907); also see, Rodney O. Davis, "Judge Ford and the Regulators, 1841-1842," Selected Papers in Illinois History (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1982), p. 29.

⁸Dixon Evening Telegraph, 31 January 1934.

⁹The History of Ogle County, Illinois (Chicago: H. F. Kett Co., 1878), p. 351.

¹⁰Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 384.

¹¹Ibid., p. 356.

¹²Republican Sentinel, 26 April 1855. Sycamore, Illinois.

¹³Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 85.

¹⁴Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, p. 66.

¹⁵Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 81.

¹⁶Dixon Evening Telegraph, 21 January 1934.

¹⁷Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 81.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 82; also, Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, p. 66.

¹⁹History of Ogle County, pp. 379-80.

²⁰Portrait and Biographical Album of Ogle County (Chicago: Clark Printing Co., 1886), p. 813; also, Rockford Morning Star, 18 April 1930.

²¹Royal Brunson Way, The Rock River Valley, 3 vols. (Chicago: S. J. Clark Publishing Co., 1926), 1:293-95.

²²Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 83; Rockford Evening Telegraph, 18 April 1930.

²³Dixon Evening Telegraph, 31 January 1934.

²⁴Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, p. 68; Dixon Evening Telegraph, 31 January 1934.

²⁵History of Ogle County, p. 362.

²⁶Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 89.

²⁷Ibid., p. 89; Dixon Evening Telegraph, 31 January 1934.

²⁸Portrait of Ogle County, p. 815; Rockford Republican, 3 August 1930.

²⁹Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 90.

³⁰Ibid., p. 90.

³¹Dixon Evening Telegraph, 31 January 1934; Rockford Republic, 3 August 1930; Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 90.

³²Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, p. 60; Portrait of Ogle County, p. 815.

³³Dixon Evening Telegraph, 31 January 1934; Ogle County Republican, 20 October 1904, p. 1; Portrait and Biographical Album of Ogle County, p. 815.

³⁴Rodney O. Davis, "Judge Ford and the Regulators, 1841-1842," Selected Papers in Illinois History (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1982), pp. 30-31; History of Ogle County, Illinois (Chicago: H. E. Kett and Co., 1878), p. 345; Ford, History of Illinois, p. 249.

³⁵Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 94.

³⁶Portrait and Biographical Album of De Kalb County, Illinois (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1885), p. 306.

³⁷Lucius H. Zeuch, M.D., History of Medical Practice in Illinois 2 vols. (Chicago: Book Press, 1927), 1:543.

³⁸Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 95.

³⁹Helen Bingham, My Scrapbook of Collections and Recollections (De Kalb County, Privately Printed, 1972), p. 50.

⁴⁰Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 98.

⁴¹Bingham, My Scrapbook, pp. 51-52.

⁴²Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, p. 89; Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 104.

⁴³Boies, History of De Kalb County, pp. 104-05.

⁴⁴De Kalb County, Circuit Court Records, Book B, 1846-1952, p. 203; Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 105.

⁴⁵Allen Bogue, From Prairie to Corn Belt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 30-31. Federal land disposal laws are discussed in Benjamin H. Hibbard, A History of the Public Land Policies (New York: Macmillan, 1924), and Roy Robbins, Our Landed Heritage: The Public Domain, 1776-1936 (Princeton, 1942); also, George M. Stephenson, The Political History of the Public Lands from 1840 to 1862: From Pre-emption to Homestead (Boston: 1917); and Thomas Donaldson, The Public Domain (Washington: 1884).

⁴⁶Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 354.

⁴⁷Republican Sentinel, 5 April 1955.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 395.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 396.

⁵¹Republican Sentinel, 19 April 1855.

⁵²Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 369.

⁵³De Kalb County Circuit Court Record, Book A, p. 1.

⁵⁴Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 377.

⁵⁵Circuit Court Records, Book A, p. 2.

⁵⁶Ibid., Book A, p. 261.

⁵⁷Ibid., Book B, June 24, 1847.

⁵⁸Ibid., Book B, March 1, 1850.

⁵⁹Ibid., Book B, March 27, 1846.

⁶⁰Boies, History of De Kalb County, p. 403.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 386.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WRITTEN WORD

The written word is dependent on the support of those who make use of it. The first of these forms of communications was the newspaper, which spread westward with the settlers like a mighty wave. Whenever a town sprang up, there was a printer with a small press, and a newspaper was sure to appear. All of the pioneer towns wanted and got a newspaper for both promotional and political reasons. They wanted them as boosters of their town, and, being politically minded, they wanted newspapers in order to promote the spread of their favorite partisan doctrine. Hence it was that villages of only a few hundred would often have two papers of differing political persuasions.

The Republican Sentinel appeared in Sycamore, De Kalb County, in 1854. Its editor, H. A. Hough, announced that the politics of the paper would be "Republican-Democratic," and he backed this up by reporting the proceedings of the conventions of the two parties.

An example of local partisan newspaper activity is revealed in the prohibition movement of the early 1850s when a campaign to restrict the availability of alcoholic liquors rolled westward from the state of Maine. In 1854

the Illinois Supreme Court upheld the principle of local option by ruling that the sale of liquor could be declared a nuisance. The Democrats were the liquor party, and, when the Illinois Legislature came under the control of a coalition of Whigs and Anti-Nebraska Democrats in 1855, Illinois passed a Maine law for total prohibition which called for a popular referendum in three months. The drys carried most of the northern counties, except Cook and Rock Island. The southern counties provided the vote that prevented the Maine Law from going into effect. The Republican Sentinel backed the prohibitionist movement, and when the referendum was presented to the voters of the state, the paper helped move De Kalb County into the dry column by a vote of 1,189 for and 357 against.¹

Another example of partisan newspaper activity is found in the turmoil of the political arena when in 1857 the Republican Sentinel was bought by the political friends of Senator Douglas, who changed the name to the De Kalb County Republican Sentinel. Under the new editors, Z. B. Mayo and Jacob Simons, it preached the political doctrines of Douglas Democracy, which advocated popular sovereignty whereby the issues of slavery would be settled within each territory by the people themselves.

This editorial policy was attacked by the nearby Belvidere Standard, which suggested that "Republican" should be dropped from the name of the Sycamore paper. The

Republican Sentinel answered that:

We are at a loss to know what the Belvidere Standard means. We know of no principle of ours that is in conflict with true republicanism. The true republican has always been regarded as a synonym with democratic.²

Anti-Douglas supporters could not let the existence of the paper pass unnoticed and in 1857 founded the True Republican, also located in Sycamore, which was published for many years. This new paper was edited by C. W. Waite, who proclaimed that "freedom is right and slavery wrong."³ It backed this editorial policy by printing in full a speech by Lyman Trumbull (who would become Senator from Illinois in 1855) given at Springfield, Illinois, in which Trumbull attacked both the evils of popular sovereignty and repeal of the Missouri Compromise, which occurred in 1854.⁴

An examination of the first De Kalb newspaper, the Republican Sentinel, shows a single sheet, folded, giving four pages. Makeup varied, but the first page typically carried two or three columns of brief advertisements; the remainder of the page was filled with the poets' corner and a chapter from the editor's choice of literature. Page two was the important page. Here were the editorials or comments on national or local topics and the activities of Congress, the state legislature, debates, addresses, and much material drawn from English or eastern newspapers. Details of local news were absent, at least in the earlier De Kalb newspapers. We look in vain for reports of acci-

dents, weddings, sickness, crop conditions, and the like. Why this was so is conjecture. Perhaps the circulation of local county papers would not support a local reporter. And the lack of local communications might have precluded an exchange of news. There was more news about London or Washington than about the county or township.

Advertisements present a microcosm of social and economic life of the earlier day. Early issues indicate the sparseness of business in the small town. There is the standard dry goods store notice with its detailed listing of dry goods, ribbons and trimmings, stoves, pumps, saddles, trusses, the usual patent medicine blurbs, and book ads.

The advertisers must have been slow in paying their bills, as indicated by the explanation of financial problems given by an original publisher of the Republic Sentinel. He states that his expenses had been \$696.99 and receipts \$403.57, leaving "us out of pocket in cash \$293.42. We have worked for glory and are out \$293.42 for honors. Requests creditors to pay their bill," or the paper would fold.⁵

Growth in county newspapers came with the introduction of the telegraph and the railroad. The telegraph reached Illinois in 1848; one line ran from Philadelphia through the state to St. Louis; the other from New York into Chicago. A line from St. Louis connected towns near De Kalb such as Rock Island, Dixon, and Galena.⁶ Franklin

Scott claims there were fifty-two papers in the state in 1840. In the score of years following, at least 731 newspapers were organized in Illinois. In 1860 286 remained, showing a net increase of 234, in spite of the great mortality.⁷

There is evidence that the Republican Sentinel reached a wide audience, since it was "read and passed to the neighbors . . . until it was unreadable."⁸ One thing is certain, it was the local newspaper that gave the pioneer an open window to the world, and his idea of government and politics came from the newspapers of the day.

Editors would speak out for themselves on matters pertinent to readers. They understood that their constituencies could see that the county had its special problems. They tended to side with the rights of the common man, but their dependence upon the federal and state governments for roads and railroads made them favor strong, centralized administration.⁹ Editors of the small town newspapers were expected to discuss national politics at length, just as preachers were expected to expound on eternal punishment; it was a function of their calling.¹⁰

The written word could be found also in the early public libraries. The earliest was established in 1819 in Edwardsville, Madison County. The second public library was located in the English settlement of Albion in Edwards County, founded in 1820. It contained one hundred to three

hundred volumes donated by the Flower family. The third was organized at Kaskaskia in 1826 and required a membership fee of twenty-five cents to one dollar.¹¹

There seems to be no doubt that the pioneer community was filled with owners and readers of books. The early settlers were transplanted citizens who moved to Illinois for greater economic self-realization and not merely to escape an older culture.¹² But to what degree was this true? How many owned books and how many read books? To arrive at a satisfactory answer is difficult because of the nature of the available evidence in De Kalb County. One early traveler reported that, "in travelling through the state, one will meet with a well thumbed and select library in the log cabin."¹³ A rather vague report. Research is limited to county records which began only in 1837; personal records which lend themselves to this topic are, so far as is known, nonexistent.

An occasional reference from another county is found. Clara Baker writes that her grandparents, who moved to Macon County in southern Illinois in the 1830s, had in their early home a number of books, mostly religious in nature. Other than the Bible, which recorded the births of members of the family, there was a copy of the Gospel Plan, Lectures on the New Testament, Hymns of Isaac Watts, and Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The small library included secular books such as

the Farmer's Almanac and Gunn's Domestic Medicine, which advised doses of castor oil to "induce gentle pukes and purges" for cases of measles. There were no books devoted to fiction; perhaps there was little time for such reading. "The book they knew best," writes Clara Baker, "was the King James Bible." All of the books were selected according to their own opinion for they were "undistracted by reviews, and lists of best sellers."¹⁴

There was, fortunately, a large number of citizens with broader intellectual requirements. This was satisfied, more or less, by the early newspapers in De Kalb County, which began publishing in the 1850s and were an important local source of information regarding books. De Kalb readers of the Republican Sentinel were regularly confronted with reviews, digests, and lists of best sellers. In addition, they were regularly visited by the traveling salesmen, who must have gone to considerable expense to visit these rural outposts of civilization to take advance orders for new books. For example, a book entitled Europe and the Allies of the Past and Today was listed in the local newspaper with the following comment:

Mr. E. G. Coe, agent for the work, is prepared to supply, and will call upon his subscribers throughout this section, those who have not already subscribed can obtain the book. Think twice before you say no when he calls upon you.¹⁵

In his weekly editorial column, the editor included a recommendation of new books. A typical example can be

found in the August 9, 1855, issue in which he writes:

Our friend Crossett, of Courtland, has laid on our table a book called The American Statesman. It is political history and contains one-thousand sixteen pages . . . and should be in the hands of every politician at least.

He reminded his readers of the book advertisements in the newspaper. On December 14, 1855, he wrote:

We would respectfully call your attention to the catalogue of books in this paper, offered to the public by Fowler and Wells, of New York City. You can get a good health library cheap, and one that would be of very great service to you. There are also great book notices which will be of interest to businessmen.

He adds that his readers should frequent the local bookstores which supply his accounts. With this in mind he prepared the following comment for the June 7, 1855, issue:

Ho, you that love good reading! Messers Mayo and Robinson have opened a new bookstore, and are prepared to supply to the public on reasonable terms. Give them a call, and our word for it you will not go away dissatisfied.

Mayo and Robinson operated a bookstore in the county seat of Sycamore and were frequent advertisers in the Republican Sentinel. The following was one of their first and showed an emphasis on school texts:

Books, books. Messers Mayo and Robinson have a supply of all kinds of school books, which they offer for very low prices. They are dealing largely and can afford them more cheaply than those who buy but a few. Let teacher and parent look to these and when in town make their purchase, they will supply you with any book you want and should they happen to be out when you call, they are getting by express constantly, and can order¹⁶

A later advertisement shows with greater clarity the full range of their stock:

They keep constantly on hand a well selected assortment of books and stationery. Pens, ink, letter and note paper, miscellaneous books, blank books, school books of all kind, magazines, periodicals and pictorials received express; pocket maps, lithographs, etc.¹⁷

A booklist advertised by Mayo and Robinson emphasized books that were well suited to the two major prejudices of the time, the anti-Catholic and antislavery feeling. Such titles as The Escaped Nun; or Disclosures of Convent Living, and Edward Beecher's Papal Conspiracy Exposed are frequently represented in the lists. An anti-slavery tract was Frederick K. Douglass' My Bondage and My Freedom; or Twenty-five Years A Freeman.¹⁸

A number of other booksellers advertised in the Republican Sentinel. Dutton and Barnes of Sycamore advertised "Yankee notions, books and stationary." George Walrod of the Sycamore Dry Goods Store advertised, "School books for sale," and Yarwood and Company, druggists in Elgin, Illinois, listed "Books and periodicals of all kinds constantly on hand."¹⁹

There were books sold by mail from New York City book sellers. Their booklists appeared every week in the Republican Sentinel. The most prominent of this group was Fowler and Wells. One of the booklists contained some fifty titles and emphasized practical books, necessary for the settlers, from the civilized eastern parts of the country.

There were twenty titles on medicine such as Accidents and Emergencies, which was a guide containing directions on how to take care of bleeding, cuts, bruises, sprains, broken bones, dislocations, railroad and steamboat accidents, choking, poison, fits, bites of mad dogs, injured eyes, etc. Another group had ten titles on women's ailments, maternity, and child training. Other New York firms placed advertisements with the newspaper. These filled less space than Fowler and Wells, and the following example listed only one book:

Who reads novels? If there are any in this section who do (and we know there are many) let them send at once for The Lost Heiress by Mrs. Southworth. This is a splendid picture of American Life and is admired by everyone who reads it. Complete in two volumes, paper cover, one dollar and cloth one dollar twenty-five cents. Sent free of postage on receipt of remittances. Address T. B. Petterson, of Philadelphia, ²⁰

The publisher could afford to run an ad for only one book as Mrs. Emma D. E. N. Southworth was one of the most popular authors in the annals of American publishing. Her two foremost novels, Ishmael and Self-Raised, sold more than two million copies each, and The Hidden Hand sold close to that figure. In all, Mrs. Southworth wrote over fifty novels, and nearly all of them sold in six figures²¹ Advertisements such as this give support to the fact that eastern book dealers were discovering a market for their books in rural America.

The written word was to be found in magazines which

gained widespread popularity in the middle of the nineteenth century and which provided a vehicle for the expression of critical literary thought and its dissemination to a comparatively restricted audience. Other types of magazines could also provide poetry, fiction, travel, history, biography, economics, political science, and many other subjects for the masses.²² Many of these periodicals were advertised in the Republican Sentinel. The editor took special pains to bring new periodicals to the attention of De Kalb farmers. In September of 1854 the editor wrote, "we have received The Genesee Farmer (Rochester, New York). It is worthy of the support of the public." Later he recommended another agricultural journal when he wrote, "we have received the Prairie Farmer for November and joyfully recommend it." Earlier, the editor wrote "Mayo and Robinson placed us under obligation to them for Harpers Monthly, Putman's Monthly, and Ballou's Pictorial."²³ There were magazines for women such as Godey's Ladies Book, and Frank Leslie's Gazette, popular medical journals such as Hall's Journal of Health and The Medical Specialist, popular scientific magazines like Scientific American, journals such as the United States Review and the United States Magazine, and moral works like Templar's Magazine which was aimed at "all friends of temperance."²⁴

It is obvious that the residents of De Kalb County had ample access to the written word, at least with the

improvement in transportation. The number of books and periodicals sold is unknown, but the advertisements do illustrate the availability of these materials. The publishers of books particularly were in business to make a profit, and we can be certain that advertising on the farming frontier would continue only as long as there was a market for books.

Among the probate records of De Kalb County, a volume of inventory records was found wherein contents of estates were described in detail. The first volume covered the years 1858 to 1860. Of the sixty-eight estates listed, fifty-four recorded no books owned and fourteen indicated ownership of books. One simply stated that there were "lots of books" but no count was given. On page 157, dated October 29, 1860, and concerning the property of John Winteringham, the list contained 156 titles of books plus his other personal belongings which amounted to one writing desk, one bed, one watch, and one English gun. An examination of the list indicated that Mr. Winteringham was a Methodist minister. From his will, written in his own hand, we know that he was forty-six years old when it was written on the "twenty-eight day of December in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty-nine."²⁵ The list of books showed a well-rounded working collection of commentaries, church histories, hand books, hymnals, and dictionaries. Other than this document, the inventory

lists give no clues as to the type of books actually owned by the early settlers.

Society on the new farming frontier in Illinois was characterized by the reassembly of values considered necessary to a useful social order which gives comfort and support to the individual. The development of this frontier society occurred gradually and with discernable patterns from the past. We have investigated one such cultural pattern in this chapter, the need for the written word. Investigating these patterns gives the historian a better understanding of society as it was in early De Kalb County beyond that which was merely economic.

FOOTNOTES

¹Republican Sentinel, 5 March 1857.

²Ibid., 23 July 1857.

³True Republican, 15 September 1857.

⁴Ibid. Senator Stephen A. Douglas offered a bill to organize the territories of Kansas and Nebraska with or without slavery and to repeal the Missouri Compromise. The Act passed the House on 22 May 1854, after having been passed by the Senate. It became law on May 30, 1854; for a survey of attempts to understand the Kansas-Nebraska Act, see Roy F. Nichols, "The Kansas-Nebraska Act: A Century of Historiography," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 43 (September 1956), and citations therein.

⁵Lewis M. Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, Illinois (Chicago: Pioneer Publishing Co., 1907), p. 101.

⁶Franklin William Scott, Newspapers and Periodicals of Illinois, 1814-1879 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1910), xix.

⁷Ibid., xviii.

⁸Gross, Past and Present of De Kalb County, p. 81.

⁹Edwin Emery, The Press and America (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 137.

¹⁰Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 137.

¹¹W. T. Norton, "Early Libraries in Illinois," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, April 1913, vol. 6, no. 1, 246-249. For a list of books owned by the Flower Family see R. Louis Travous, "Pioneer Illinois Library," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society XLII (December 1949): 446-453.

¹²Ray Allen Billington, America's Frontier Heritage (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1966), chapter 4.

¹³D. Jones, Illinois and the West with A Township Map (Boston: Weeks, Jordan and Company, 1838), p. 102.

¹⁴Clara M. Baker, "Books in a Pioneer Household," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 32 (1939) 263.

¹⁵Republican Sentinel, 7 January 1855.

¹⁶Ibid., 14 June 1855.

¹⁷Ibid., 22 November 1855.

¹⁸Ibid., 3 October 1855, and 15 November 1855.

¹⁹Ibid., 15 May 1855; also, Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), II:1850-1865, p. 357.

²⁰Ibid., 14 December 1854.

²¹Ibid., Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, II:1850-1865, p. 362; and Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes, The Story of Best Sellers in The United States (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 126-142.

²²James Playsted Wood, Magazines in the United States (New York: Ronald Press, 1971), p. 58.

²³Republican Sentinel, 5 April 1855.

²⁴Ibid., 2 August 1855.

²⁵Probate Records, De Kalb County, Illinois, Box 51. The value of the estate was set at three hundred dollars.

SUMMARY

The thesis of this dissertation is that the settler in De Kalb County was relatively prosperous when he arrived in the county, and that the normal settlement sequence of hunter-pioneer to itinerant settler to substantial farmer did not occur. In addition, most of these settlers arrived not by rivers and roads to the south, but from their former homes in the East via the waterways of the Great Lakes to Chicago and then to De Kalb County. This gave these settlers, in a general sense, higher social and economic expectations than those in the older counties in the state.

Land sales in De Kalb County began in 1843, and by 1854 all of the unoccupied land in the county had been sold and the frontier passed out of the area to regions farther west. Before settlement, there had been only open prairie and groves of trees, but by 1865 new homes, barns, churches, country schools, plowed fields, and roads all gave evidence of man's settlement of the land. Less visible, but just as important, was the establishment of institutions necessary to protect the accomplishments and preserve the values of the settlers. These institutions, which included local government and the law, provided a framework for

organizing a structured society which settlers of De Kalb could not and would not want to do without. In addition to institutions there were always the natural leaders who gave a focus of authority to the community--the large land owners, the newspaper editors, and the church pastors.

On the earlier frontiers in the southern part of the state, the hunters were first to arrive, expert woodsmen who lived in half-faced shelters or small cabins. The unsurveyed land was free, and there was no one to collect rent or taxes. Men of this type flitted before the advancing tide of settlement. Love of the wild was ingrained in these mostly illiterate men, who could abandon their holdings and move on. After them came the squatter, who stopped a year or perhaps five years in a place to build a cabin and clear a few acres of corn for his family to supplement the spoils of his rifle until he sold his improvements to a more permanent settler.

After the squatter came the farmer, the man with stock or capital who did not settle on any land save what he owned or expected to be able to buy. Primitive in his first living arrangements on the frontier, the farmer presumably wanted to reproduce the comforts of his old home back East. Like the squatter, his household arrangements might begin with a half-faced camp of logs rolled up to afford shelter on three sides, with an open fire on the fourth to which the sleeping family stretched its feet for

warmth; but this was soon to be replaced by the single or double log cabin, with puncheoned floors, chinked walls, and, finally, efficient doors and windows. A few bits of finer portable furniture might recall the comforts of the old home. The farmer of this type was the backbone of the new community in De Kalb County.

In earlier chapters we followed the farmer of De Kalb County as he bought his land, broke the prairie, provided shelter and sustenance for his family, battled crime, and, hopefully, amassed capital. The fact is that all of these activities had been done by other pioneer farmers throughout the history of the state of Illinois, so these activities alone did not make the farmer of De Kalb unique from thousands of others who settled in other parts of the state.

The primary difference was that the settler in De Kalb County moved directly from the East and desired to reconstruct society as he had experienced it in New England. The word reconstruction is used deliberately because the trek from the East to northern Illinois was more than a journey; it was partly a transference of an older society, partly the creation of a new one. The social values of the former life remained intact but were altered somewhat by conditions found on the farming frontier. The new social, political, and economic opportunities encountered in farming the undeveloped land of De Kalb

County imposed new demands on the society taking shape. In the broadest sense, social values, or culture, are defined as the way people relate to one another, a sharing of common experiences, future hopes and goals, and common values and priorities.

The unique thing about this civilization in transit was the elemental role played by the frontier environment. There were no Indians or dangerous wild life in northern Illinois, but there was the undeveloped land which required a temporary return to more primitive social-economic conditions. The settler was, for a while, stripped of many accumulations and social trappings which living in a settled area gives to the individual and was forced to become a rather self-sufficing person, supplying his wants from what his environment afforded. His standard of living, fixed in an older society, had to yield almost completely for the time being. Primal needs of food, shelter, and clothing had to take precedence, and the skill of his own hand had to determine the degree of comfort he enjoyed. Under the pressure to provide security for his family, the settler was often forced temporarily to alter the pattern of life brought from the older region, and new ways and means better suited to the frontier had to be developed.

Of course, we read letters of hard-working men and women and read of the building of houses and barns and the struggle, sometimes successful and sometimes not, to

achieve the ordinary comforts of life. Many complained of the deadly weather and short, unhealthy lives. But we recall also the newspapers established in the county and the many advertisements for books carried in these same newspapers. We also have abundant evidence from the same source of the intense interest in politics, and we can sense the energy expended by the citizens in supporting local government.

The men who built the county came from civilized communities, and their immediate concern after survival was to reproduce in the new surroundings the institutions they had known in the old, institutions that were quite as much their own as if they had never left their eastern homes. Some institutions were strained to the breaking point as detailed in the chapter on crime. Changes in the institutions were made as experience warranted, but it would be incorrect to assume that because of the early outbreak of violence the frontier in northern Illinois was a lawless place.

When the settlers encountered the criminal activities of local county gangs, the violent reaction was predictable. The absence of local law enforcement agencies allowed the gangs to enlarge their activities to the point where they endangered the social structure of the community, and the farmers, of necessity, had to provide for its defense. It was essential to reconstruct and preserve the ideals and

dreams brought to the new county along with families and household goods. In the chapter on crime, we saw that vigilante activity within the county was the local response to those who threatened this framework.

As the settlers traveled to Illinois in the early years, the Ohio River was the main highway to the state and Shawneetown was its gateway. A few found their way across the Wabash River from Indiana, a few came by the roads or rivers of western Kentucky to the Ohio River which they crossed merely to reach the state; but the main travel in the early years was by the Ohio. Later, the rivers were supplemented by the National Road, the great national highway from Wheeling on the Ohio River across the states of Ohio and Indiana, and by other land routes.

The peopling of northern Illinois occurred after the Black Hawk War, and the source of this migratory stream was New England. The stream of population, caught and held for a time in upper New York, driven westward by unsettled economic conditions at home and lured onward by improved transportation routes to the area, filled the northern portion of the state as solidly as their southern compatriots had filled the lands to the south. The Erie Canal, opened to traffic in 1825 from the Hudson River to Lake Erie, offered the first really satisfactory means of reaching the prairie country from New England, and the effect of this waterway was to deflect the immigrant stream

from the Ohio Valley to the Great Lakes.¹

We visualize farmers in New England owning land of marginal agricultural value, facing changing economic conditions in the area along with growing competition from farmers who shipped produce from the West, seizing the opportunity to sell for whatever they could get and moving to De Kalb County. In De Kalb County they could obtain large tracts of rich land using, for the most part, land warrants purchased elsewhere. These new settlers had experience in farming and had economic resources which enabled them to settle quickly the farming frontier of northern Illinois.

Settling the land did not mean instant success. In the chapter on transportation, we saw that the ability to move grain economically to the market was essential to the development of commercial farming in De Kalb County, and the problem was solved by the development of the railroad, which revolutionized the commercial structure of the county. It was shown that the railroad gave the farmer an opportunity to realize a profit, for he could now haul his grain to local sidings for shipment to the storage facilities in Chicago. All of the grain would be subject, of course, to distant influences in pricing beyond his understanding, but at last he could tap the marketplace with the produce of his farm.

Gone was the long and exhausting travel to Chicago or

other marketplaces by oxen-drawn wagon for meager and unknown rewards, and gone too was the painful isolation of the frontier life, for the railroad provided not only commercial possibilities but offered a social link to the outside world. Turnpikes and an improved road system would have provided access to the Chicago market, but the profit potential of the railroad and the speed of freight movement resulted in a rapid expansion of the system in northern Illinois. This development negated a wagon road system as a viable alternative to the railroad, at least for large volumes of grain delivered at cheap cost.

The impact on the oasis-like world that existed before the advent of the railroad is discussed in the chapter on the written word, where the large number of book advertisements placed in the local county newspapers by New York publishers is noted. Railroad travel by book salesmen to the area could be done cheaper, faster, in all seasons, and with this the age of the traveling salesman had begun. The longing for social trappings of the former life, a strong need to satisfy their own mental hunger, and a desire to educate their children created a market for books on the county frontier, and the new railroad provided the connection between the need and its fulfillment.

Local history offers a temptation for the historian to manipulate the facts in the interest of the thesis, which can result in an ideology of sorts where none exists.

This is because the facts and events in local history are in themselves of such small importance that the selective process can proceed endlessly and remain subjective. Local history at best should contain a sense of history as accidental and perhaps cyclical, of human conduct as a steady stream running through endless fields of changing circumstances, of good and bad always co-existing and mixed in periods as in people. As to treatment, I believe that the material must precede the thesis, that chronological narrative is the spine and the bloodstream that brings history closer to how it really was and leads to a proper understanding of cause and effect; that, whatever the subject, it must be written in terms of what was known and believed at the time, not from the perspective of hindsight. The thesis then provides the supporting structure.

FOOTNOTE

¹Excellent interpretative chapters are in Fredrick J. Turner, The United States, 1830-1850 (New York: Henry Holt, 1935), and Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion (New York: Macmillan, 1967); also useful is Malcolm J. Rohrbough, The Trans-Appalachian Frontier, People, Societies, and Institutions 1775-1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 5, 236, and John A. Caruso, The Great Lakes Frontier (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961). Of particular importance is Lois Kimball Mathews, The Expansion of New England (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), and Stewart H. Holbrook, The Yankee Exodus (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950).

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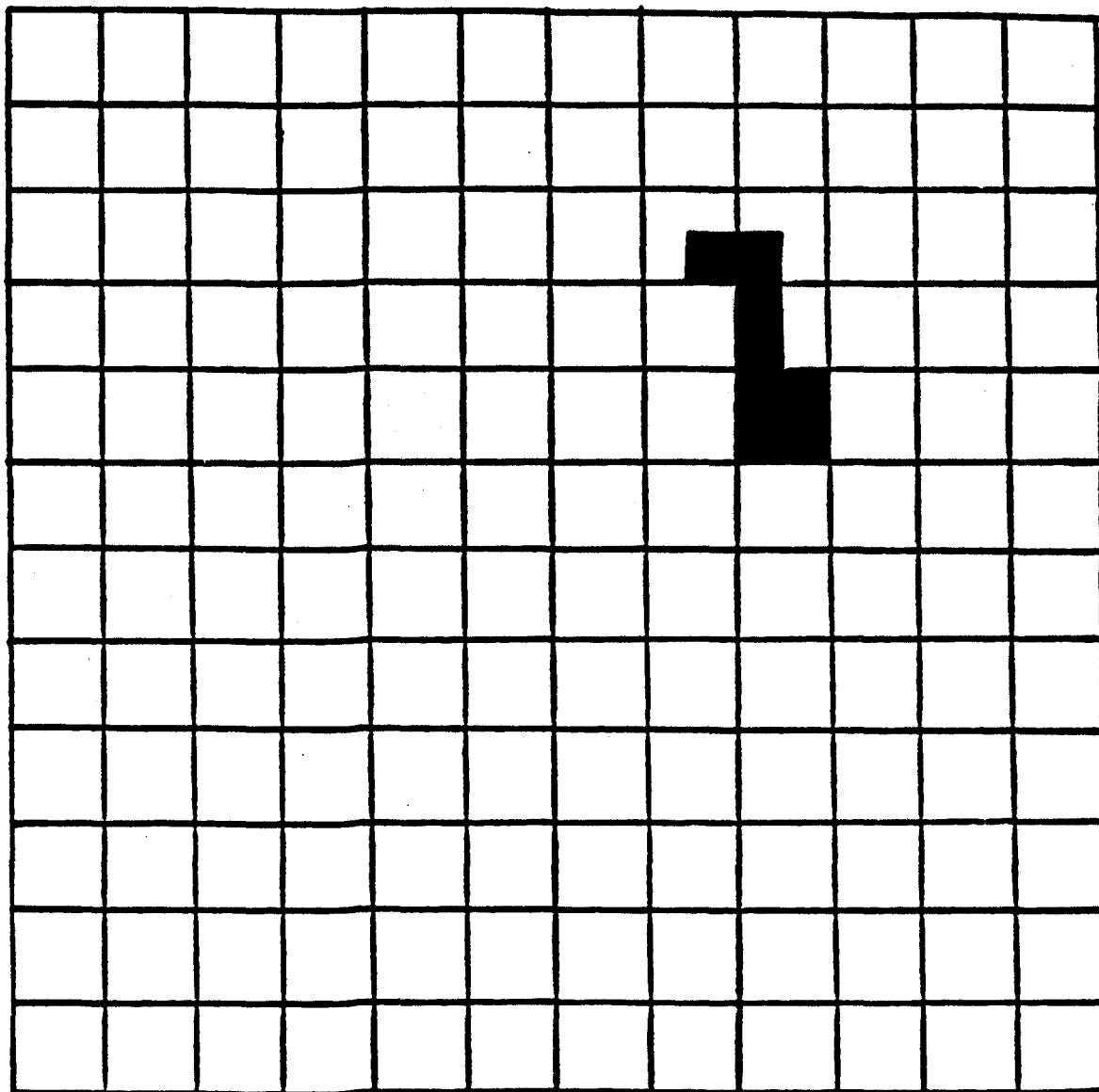
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APPENDIX A

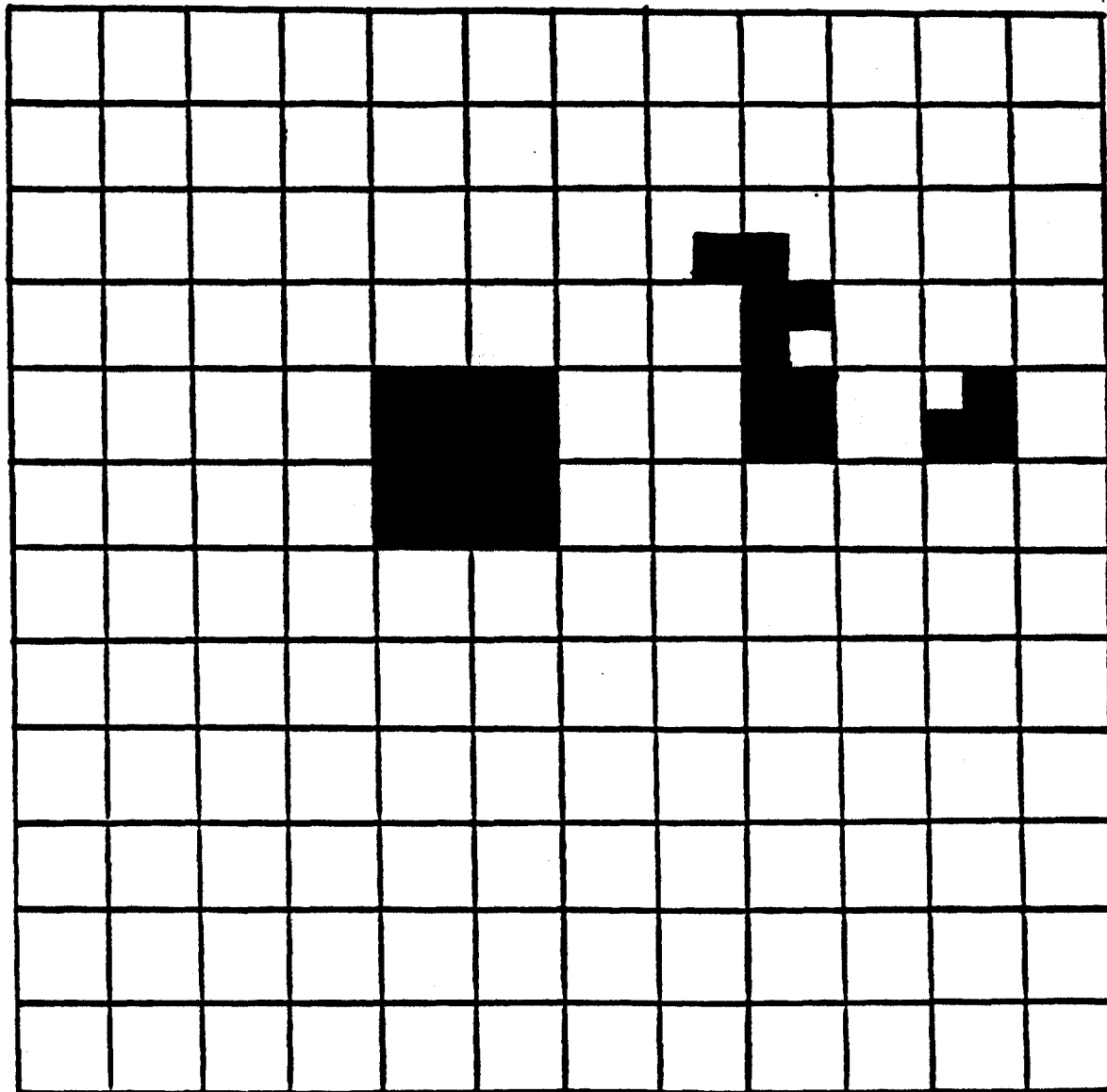
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Source, Public Domain Sales Land Tract Record Listing
(Springfield: State Archive Division, 1982).

1843



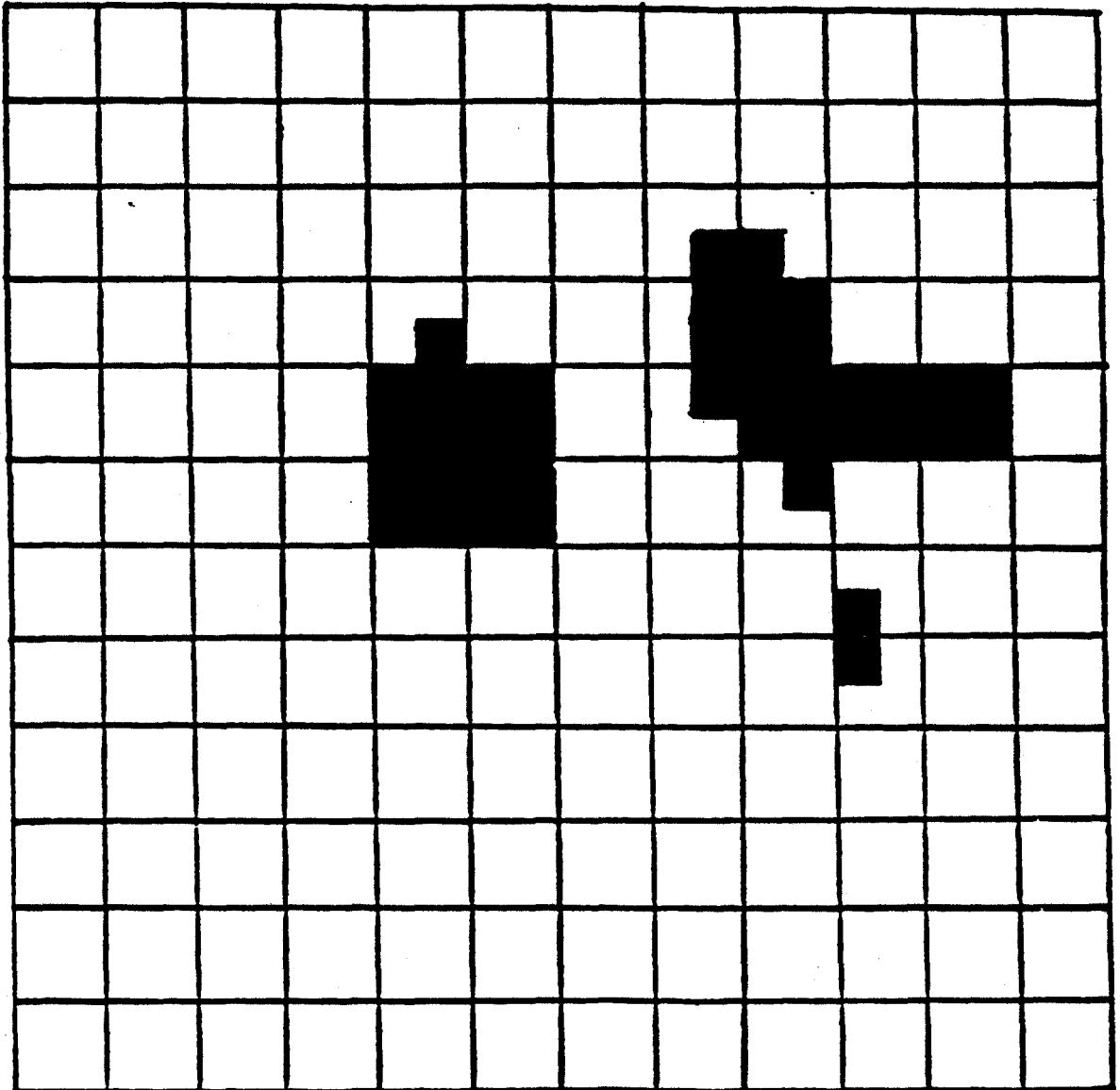
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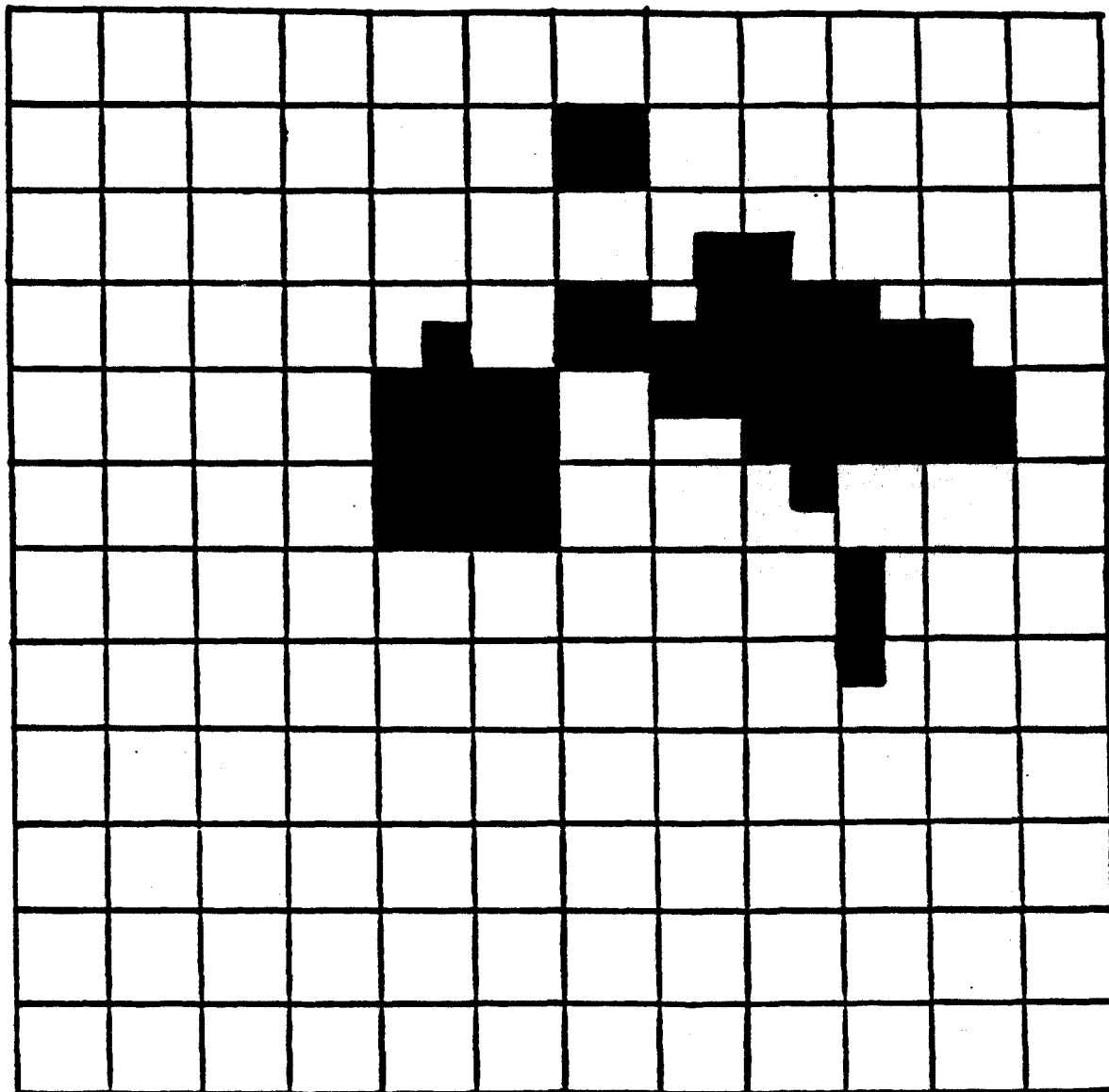
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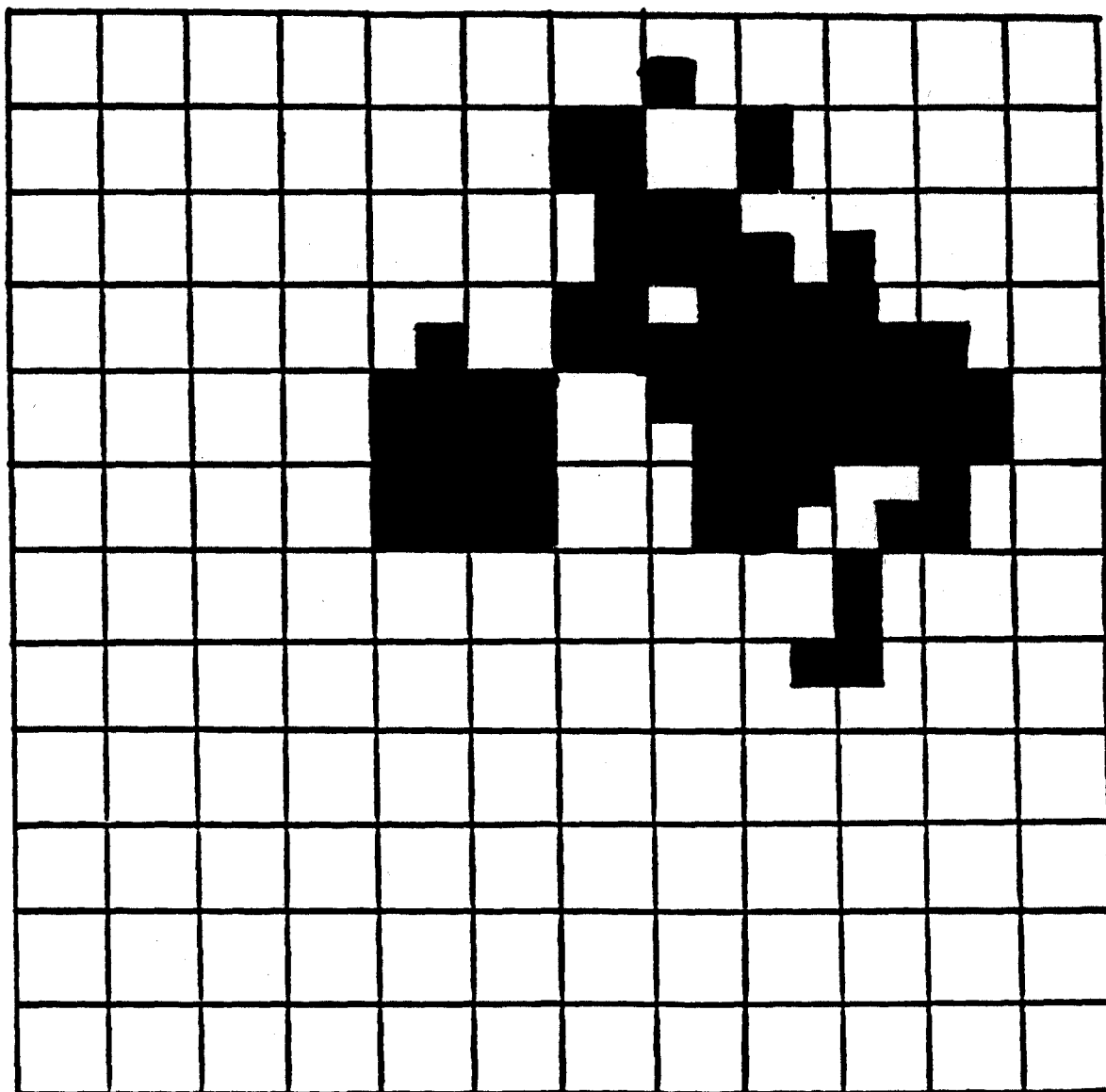
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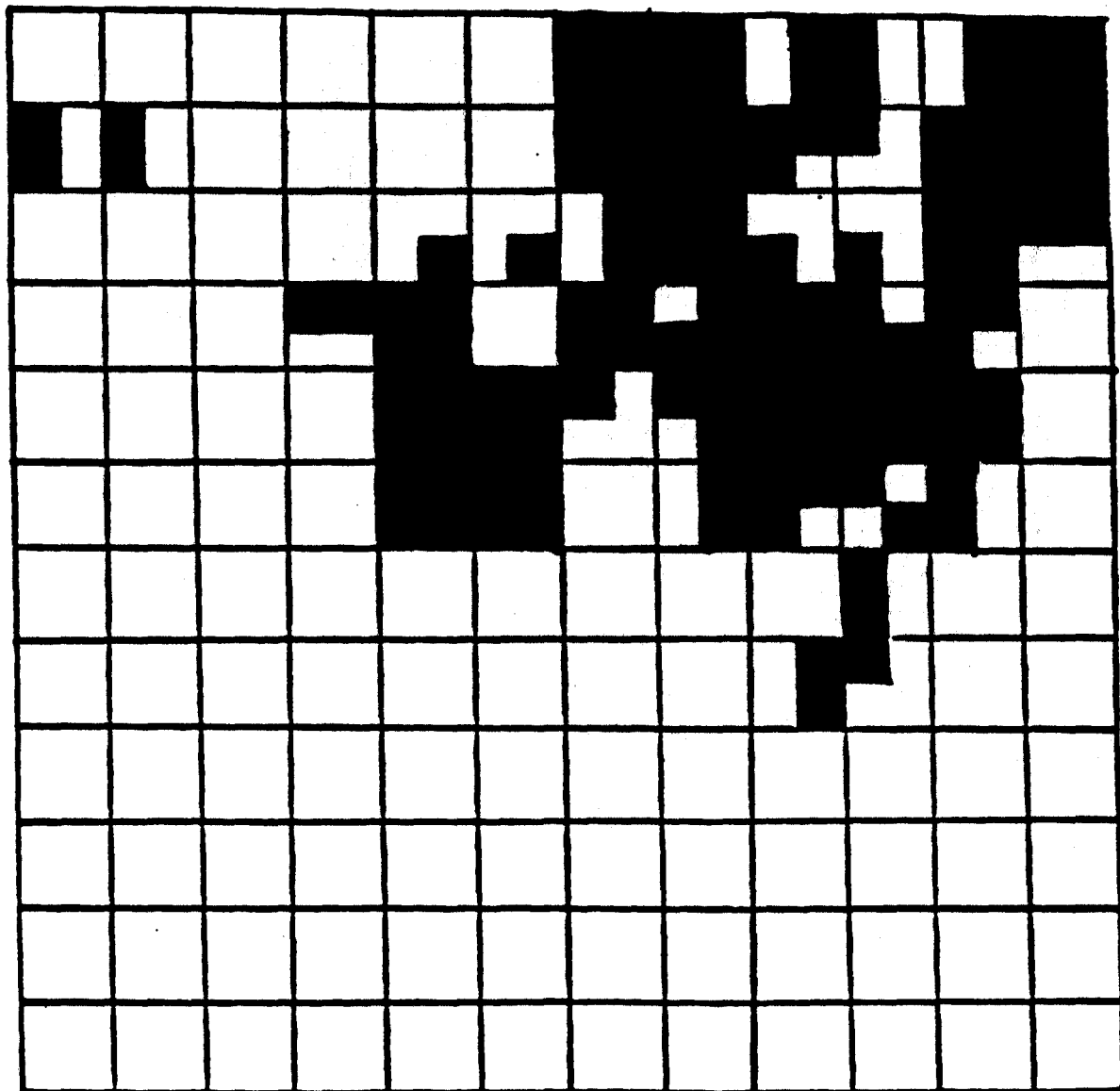
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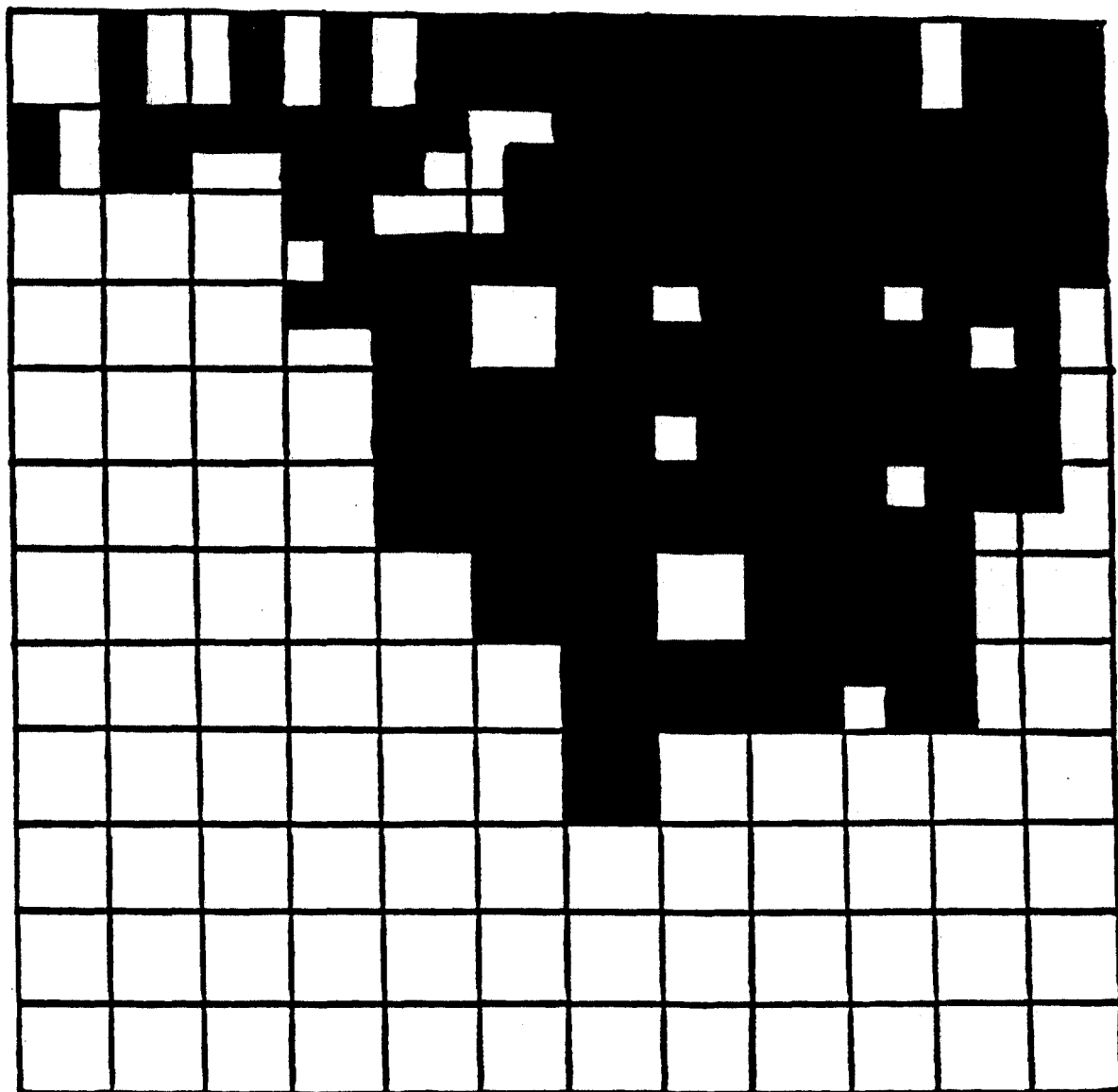
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1848



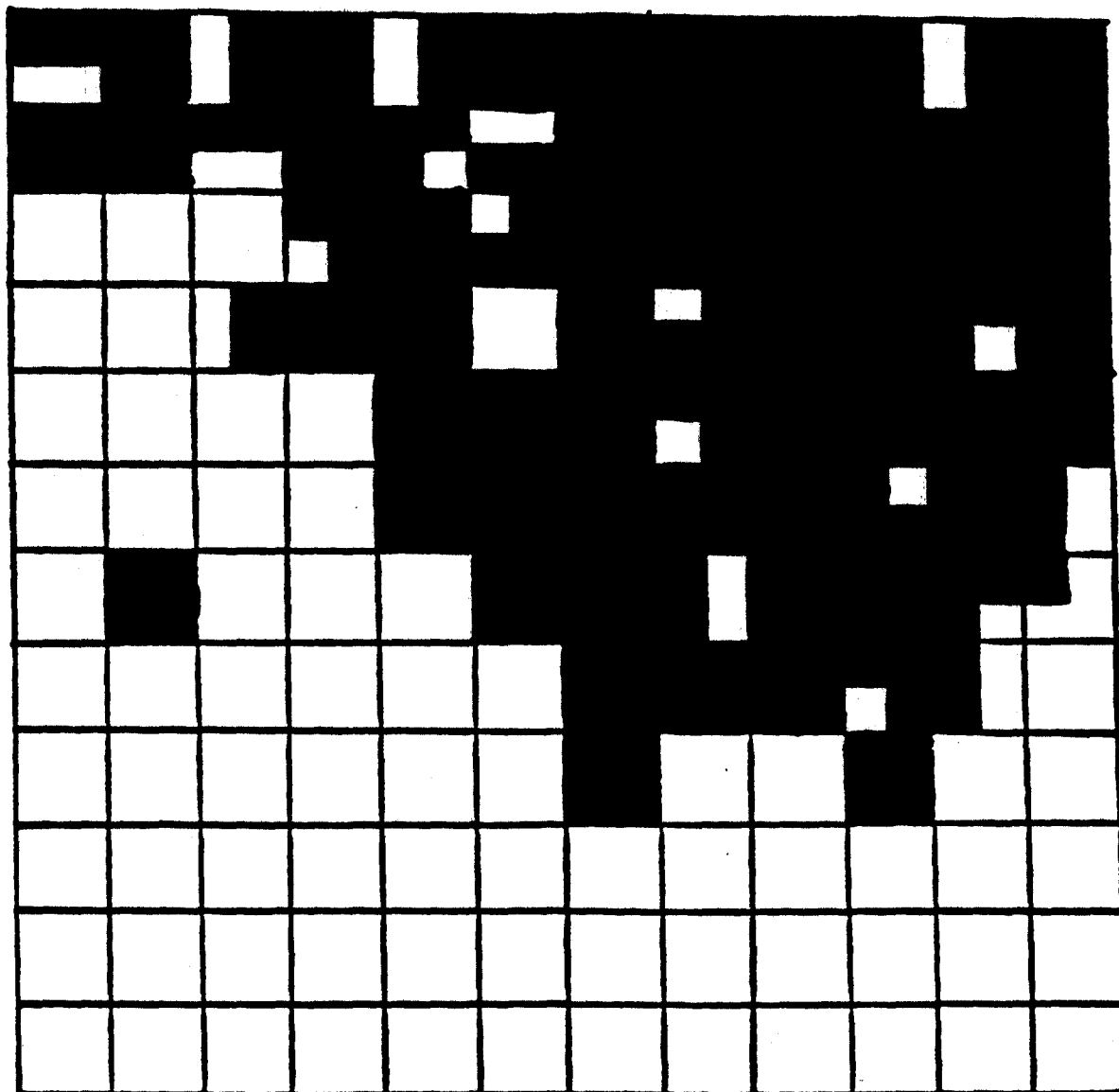
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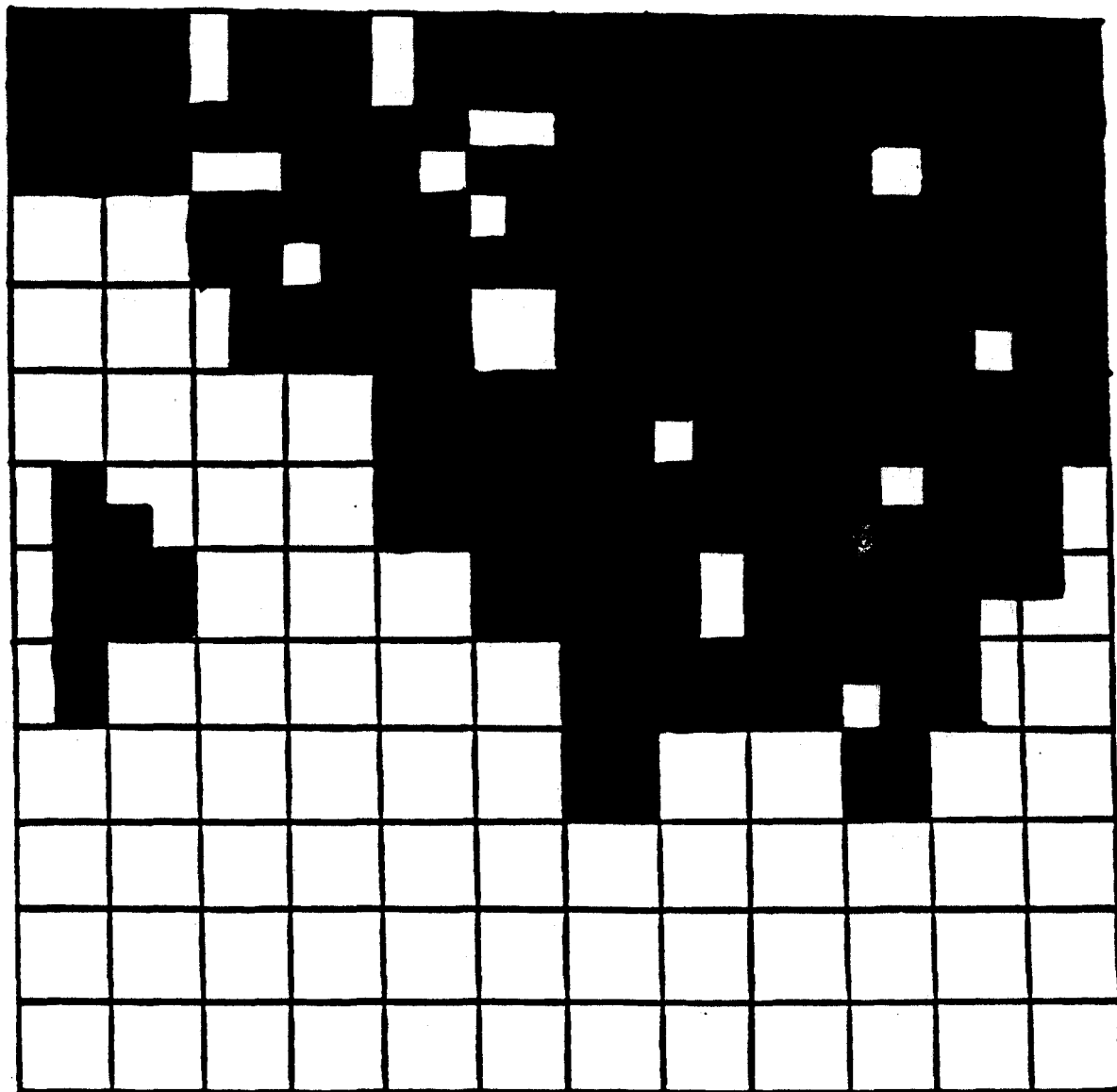
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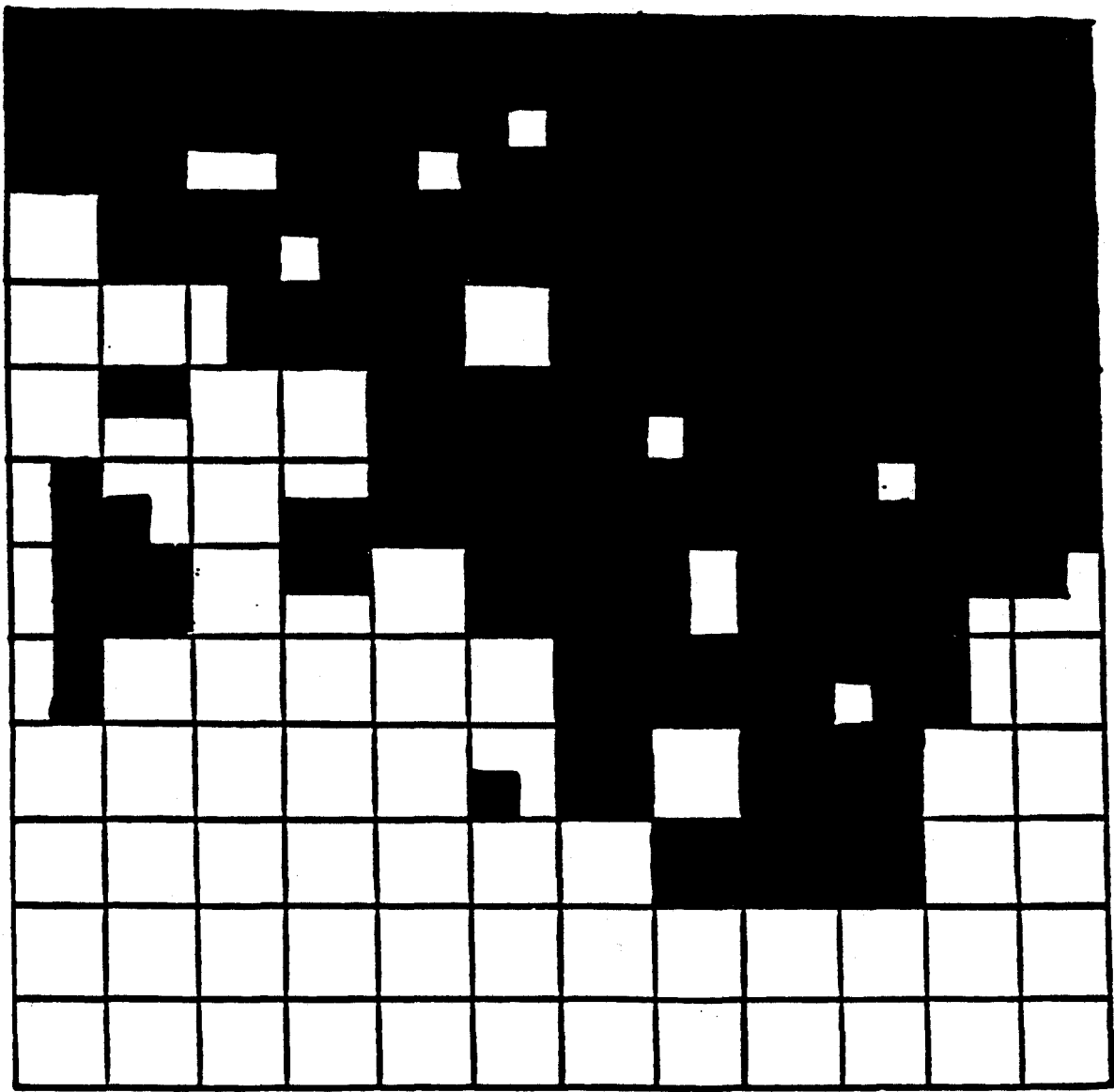
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1851



CUMULATIVE LAND ENTRY

1852



CUMULATIVE LAND ENTRY

1853

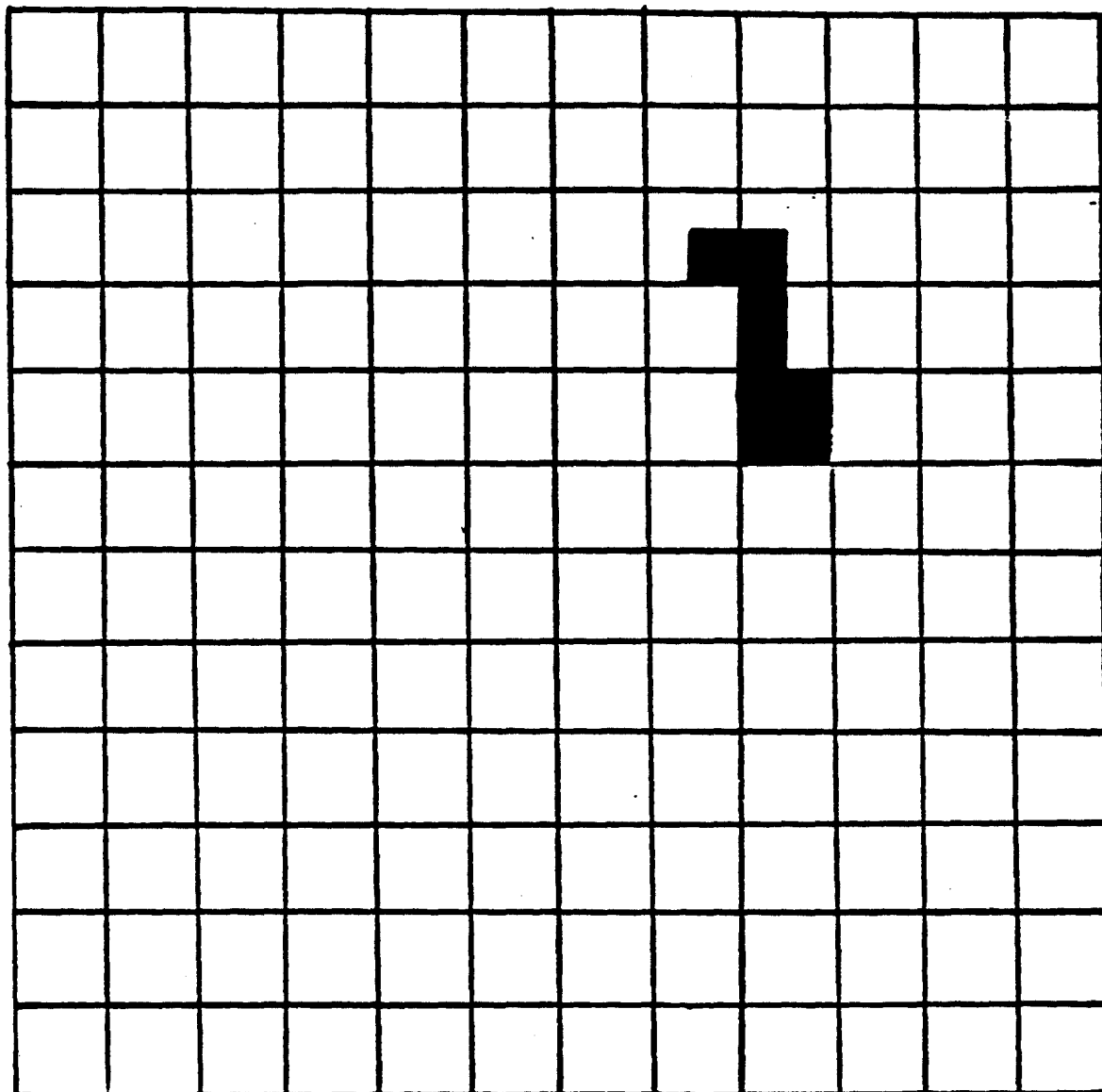
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CUMULATIVE LAND ENTRY

APPENDIX B

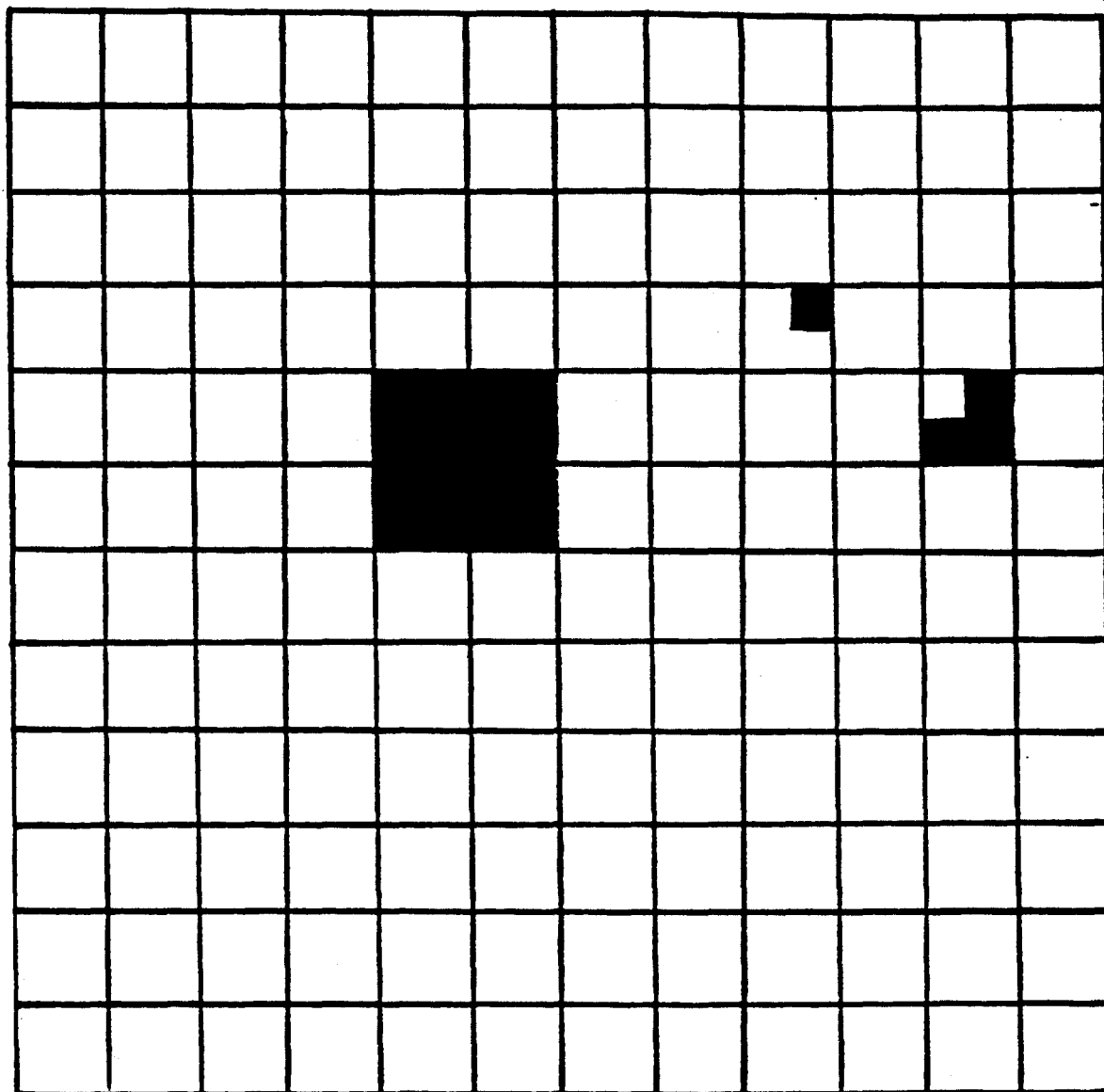
Land Entry by Year, 1843-1854
Source, Public Domain Sales Land Tract Record Listing
(Springfield: State Archive Division, 1982)

1843



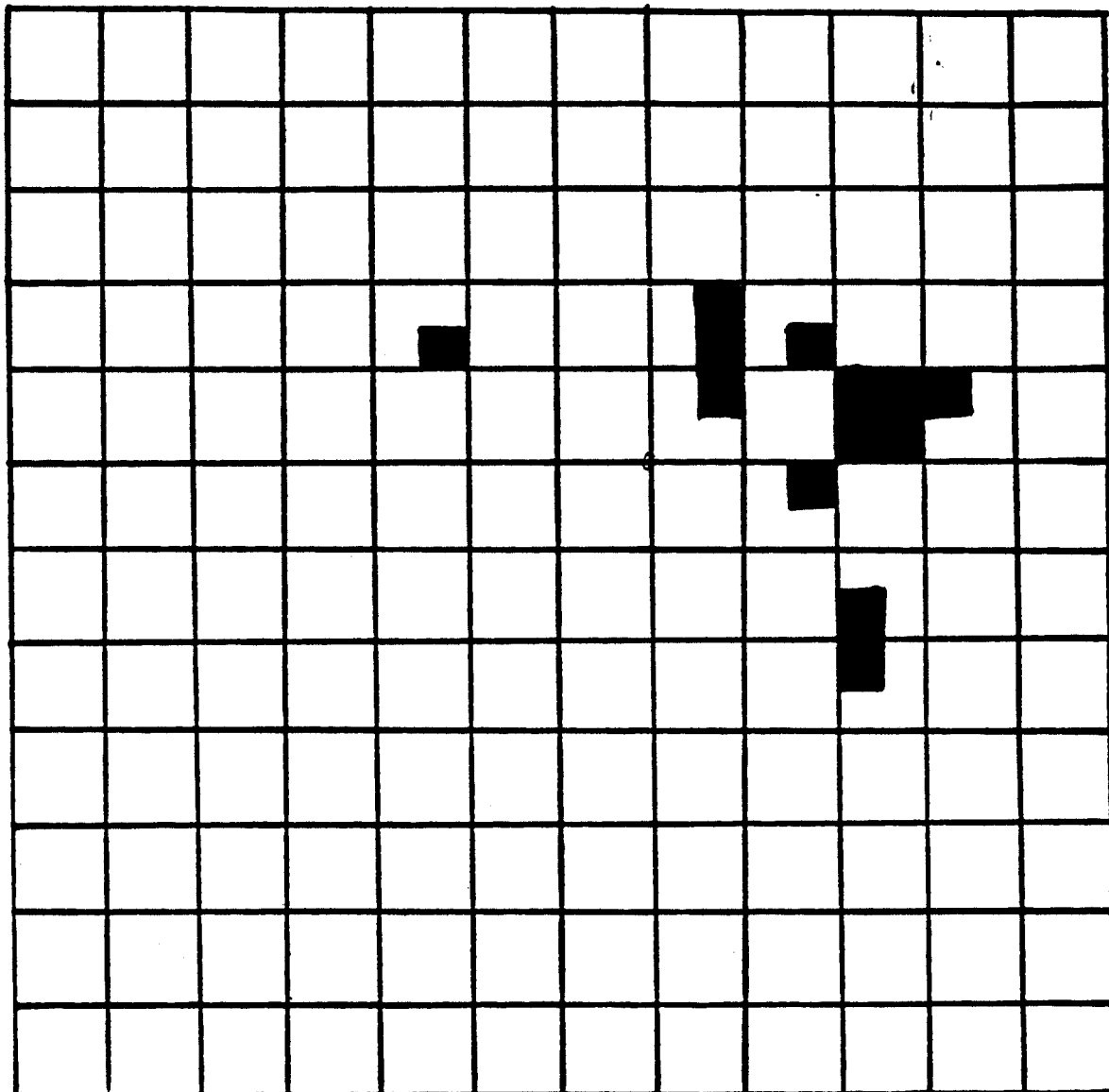
LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

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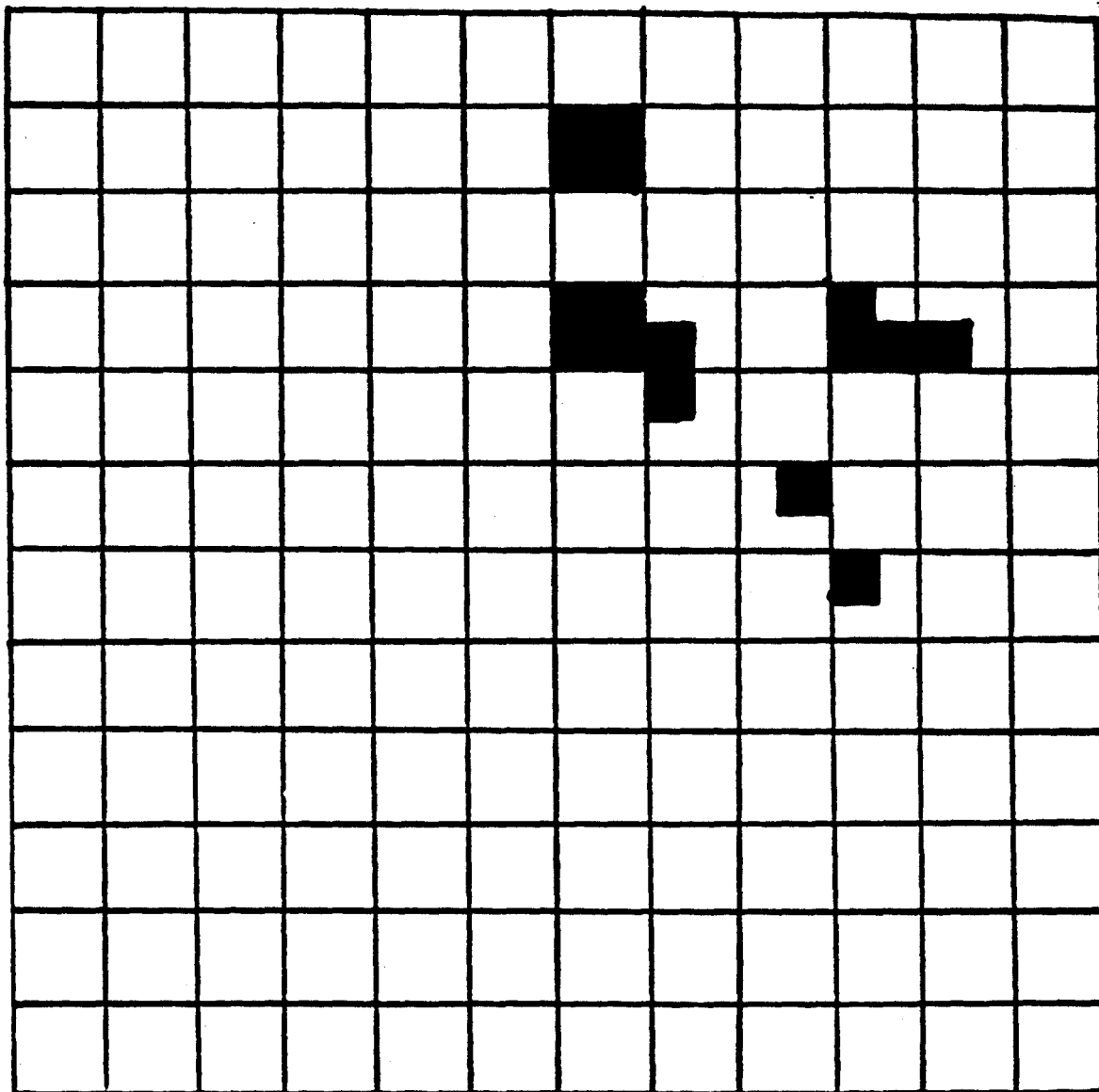
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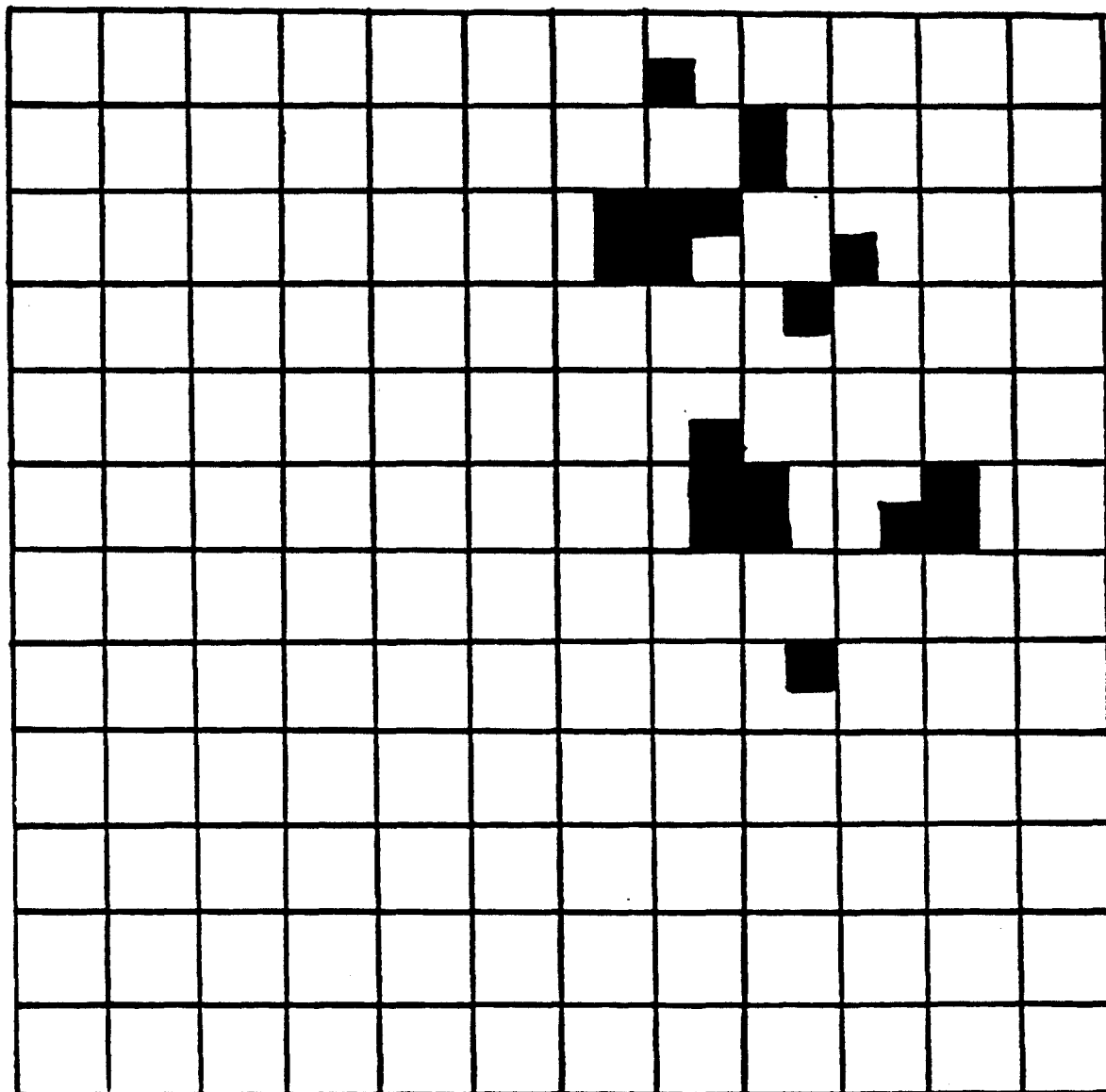
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1846



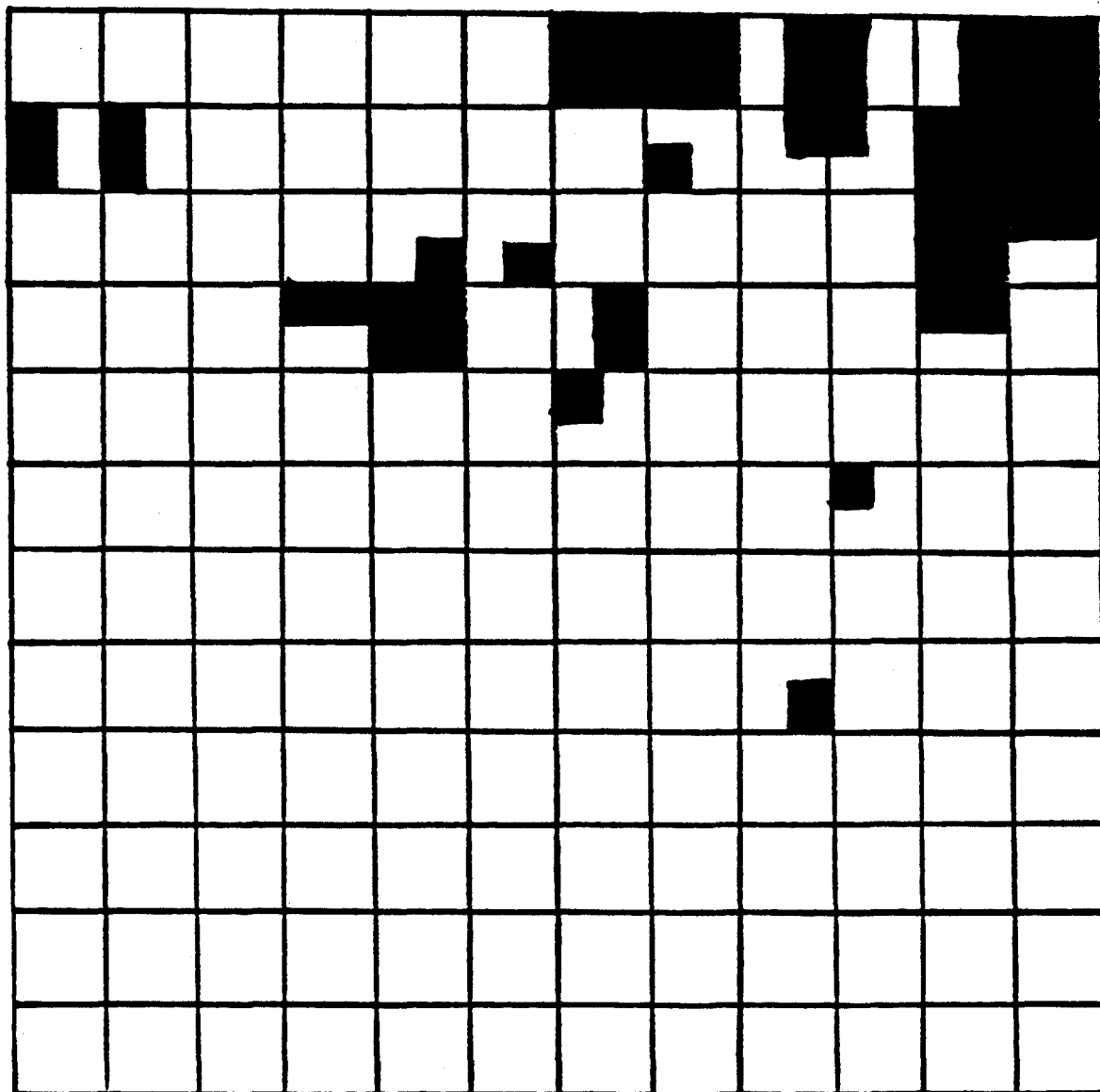
LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

1847



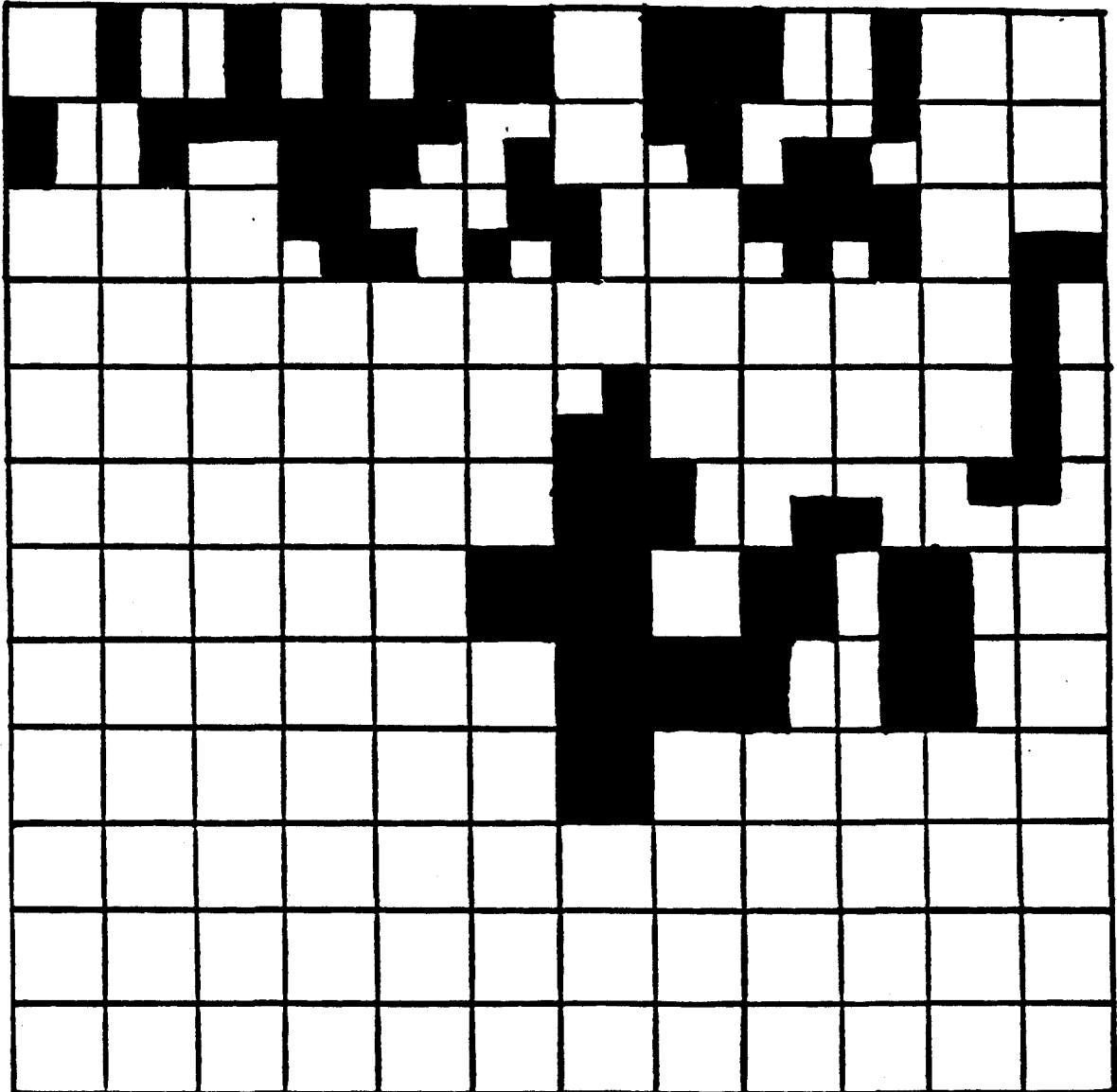
LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

1848



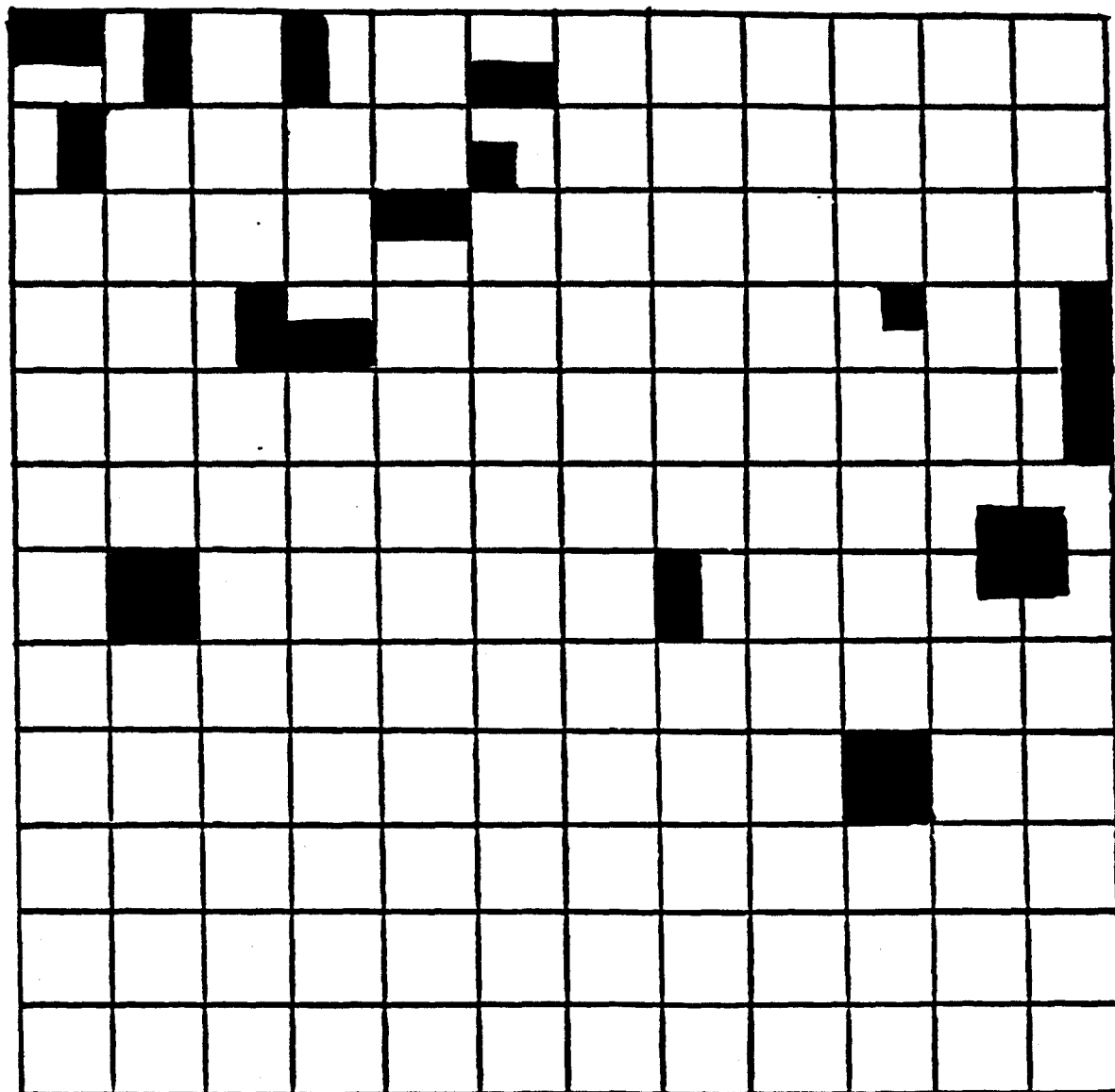
LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

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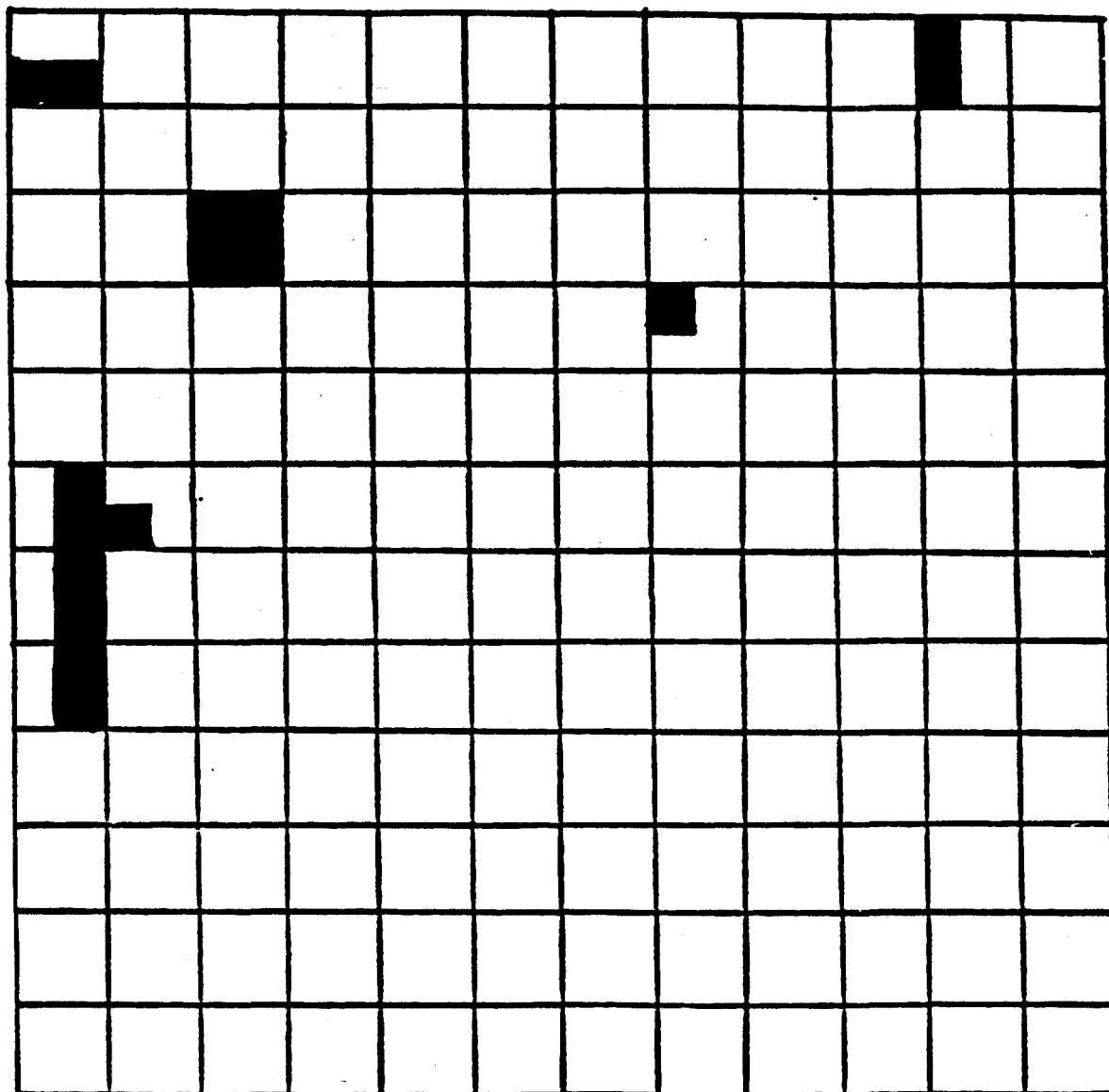
LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

1850



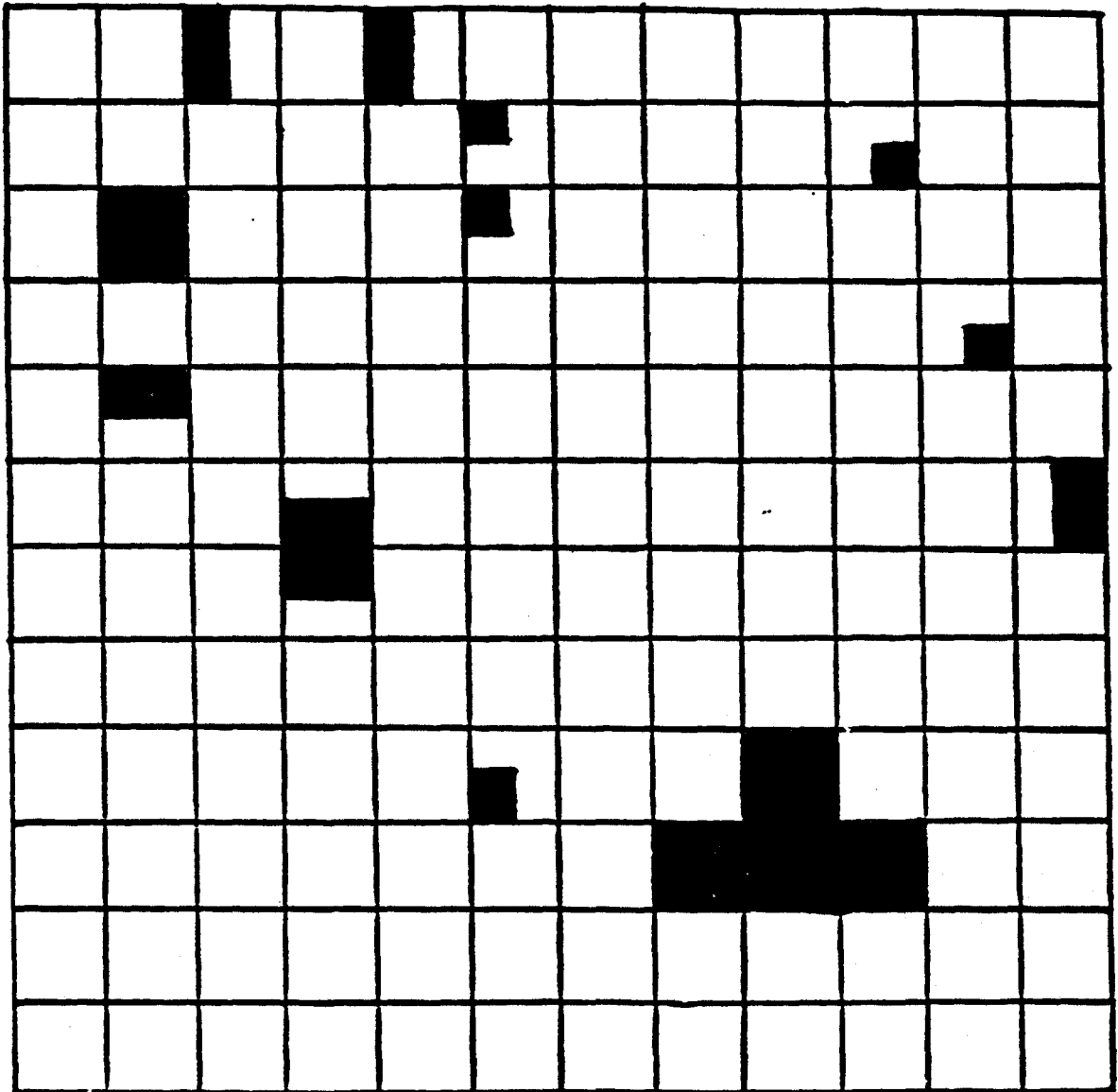
LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

1851



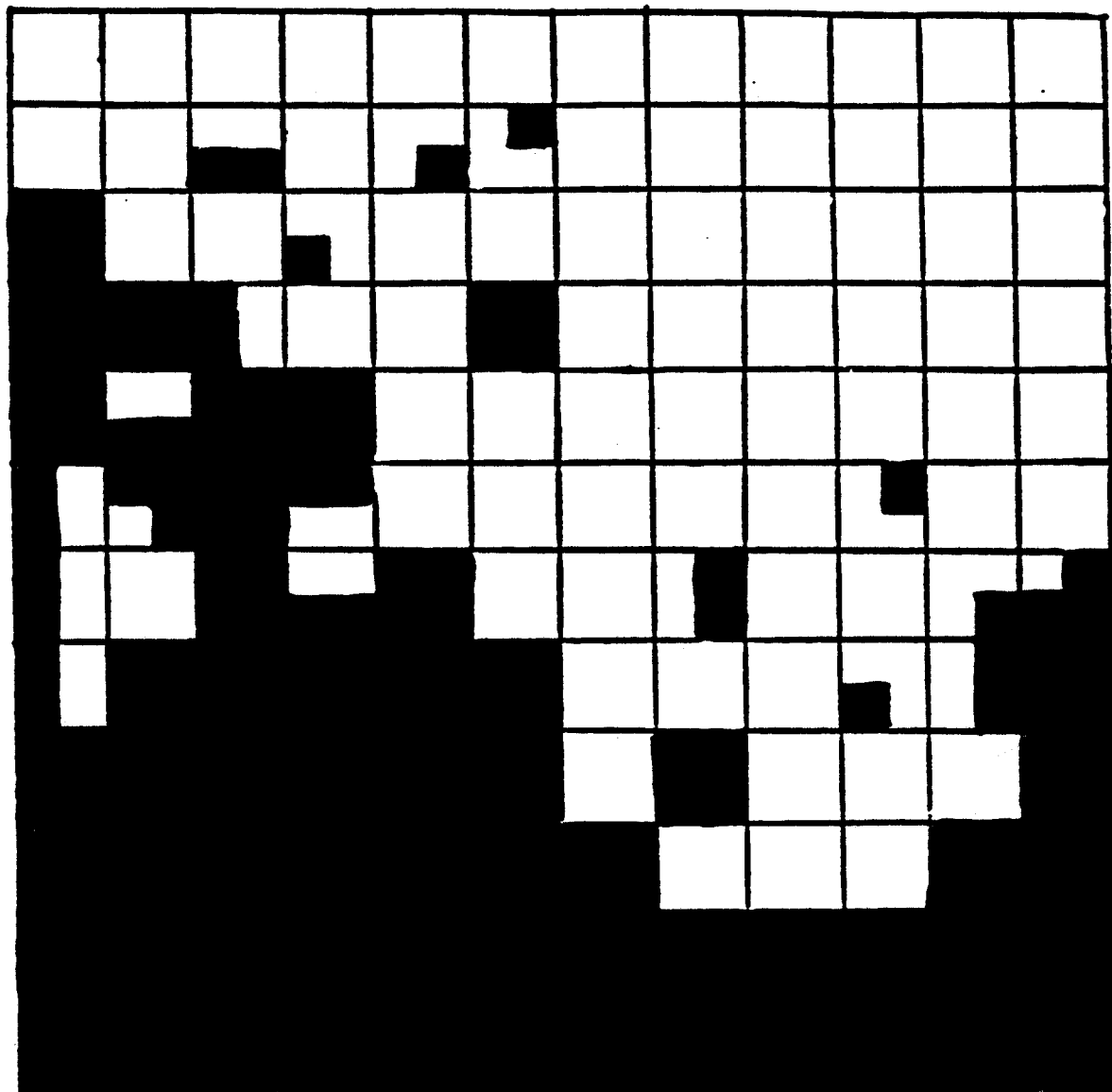
LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

1852



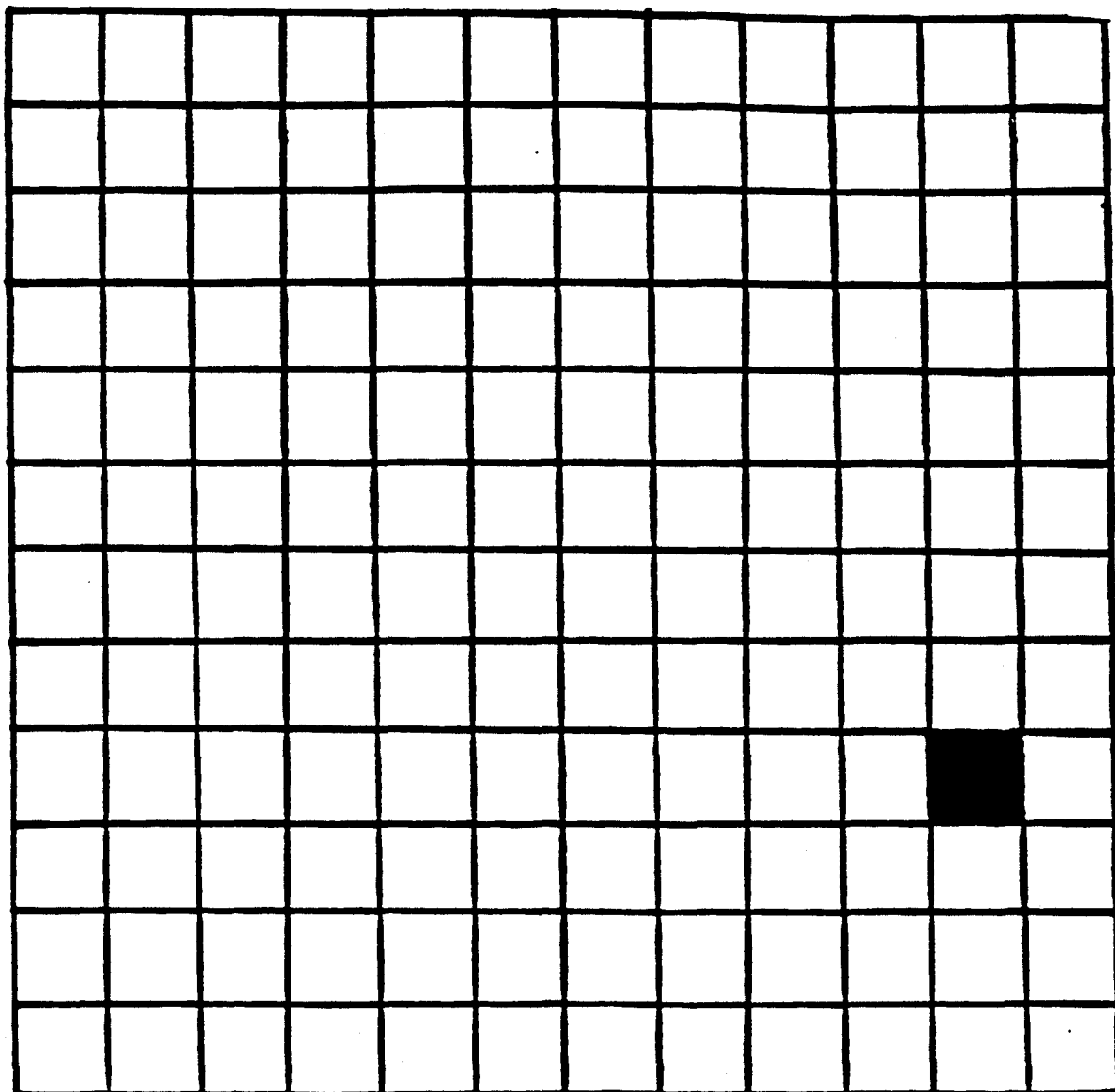
LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

1853



LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

1854



LAND ENTRY BY YEAR

APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Otto J. Tinzmann has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Robert McCluggage, Director
Professor, History, Loyola

Dr. James Penick
Professor, History, Loyola

Dr. Theodore Karamanski
Associate Professor, History, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

3/18/86
Date

Robert W. McCluggage
Director's Signature